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A NOBLE LIFE.

VOL. II.







A NOBLE LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,"

"CHRISTIAN'S MISTAKE,"

&c. &c.

FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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Chapter the First.


VOL. II.

B








 HE Earl reached Edinburgh in the beginning of winter, and in those days an Edinburgh winter was a very gay season. That brilliant society, which has now become a matter of tradition, was then in its zenith. Those renowned supper-parties, where great wits, learned philosophers, and clever and beautiful women, met together, a most enjoyable company, were going on almost every night, and drawing into their various small circles everything that was most attractive in the larger circle outside.

Lord Cairnforth was a long time before he suffered himself to be drawn in likewise; but the business which detained him in Edinburgh grew more and more tedious: he found difficulties arise on every hand, and yet he was determined not to leave until he had done all he wanted to do. Not only in money, but by personal influence, which now that he tried to use it, he found was considerable, he furthered, in many ways, the interests of Mr. Menteith's sons. The widow, too, a gentle, helpless woman, soon discovered where to come to, on all occasions, for counsel and aid. Never had the Earl led such a busy life—or one more active, as far as his capabilities allowed.

Still, now and then time hung on his

.



hands, and he felt a great lack of companionship; until, by degrees, his name and a good deal of his history got noised abroad, and he was perfectly inundated with acquaintances. Of course, he had it at his own option how much or how little he went out into the world. Every advantage that rank or fortune could give, was his already; but he had another possession still—his own as much here as in the solitudes of Cairnforth, the art of making himself “weel likit.” The mob of “good society,” which is no better than any other mob, will run after money, position, talent, beauty, for a time; but it requires a quality higher and deeper than these, and distinct from them all, to produce lasting popularity.

This the Earl had. In spite of his infirmities he possessed the rare power of winning love, of making people love him for his own sake. At first, of course, his society was sought from mere curiosity, or even through meaner motives; but gradually, like the good clergyman with whom


“Fools who came to scoff, remained to pray,”

those who visited him to stare at, or pity a fellow-creature so afflicted, remained, attracted by his gentleness, his patience, his wonderful unselfishness. And some few, of nobler mind, saw in him the grandest and most religious spectacle that men can look upon, a human soul which has not suffered itself to be conquered by adversity.

Very soon, the Earl gathered round

him, besides acquaintances, a knot of real friends, affectionate and true, who, in the charm of his cultivated mind and the simplicity of his good heart, found ample amends for everything that nature had denied him, — the loss of which he bore so cheerfully and uncomplainingly.

By-and-bye, induced by these, the excellent people whom, as by mesmeric attraction, goodness soon draws to itself, he began to go out a little into society. It could be done ; with some personal difficulty and pain, and some slight trouble to his friends, which last was for a long time his chief objection. For a merciful familiarity with his own affliction had been brought about by time,



and by the fact that he had never known any other sort of existence, and only, as a blind person guesses at colours, could speculate upon how it must feel to move about freely, to walk and run. He had also lost much of his early shyness, and ceased to feel any actual dread of being looked at. His chief difficulty was the practical one of locomotion, and this for him was solved much easier than if he had been a man of limited means. By some expenditure of money, and by a good deal of ingenious contrivance, he managed to be taken about as easily in Edinburgh as at Cairnforth: was present at church and law-court, theatre and concert-room, and at many a pleasant reunion of pleasant people everywhere.

For in his heart Lord Cairnforth rather liked society. To him, whose external resources were so limited, who could in truth do nothing for his own amusement but read, social enjoyments were very valuable. He took pleasure in watching the encounter of keen wits, the talk of clever conversationalists. His own talent in that line was not small, though he seldom used it in large circles; but with two or three only about him, the treasures of his well-stored mind came out often very brilliantly. Then he was so alive to all that was passing in the world outside, and took as keen an interest in politics, social ethics, and schemes of philanthropy, as if he himself had been like other men, instead of being condemned (or exalted — which shall we say? *Dis aliter*

visum) to a destiny of such solemn and awful isolation.

Yet he never put forward his affliction, so as to make it painful to those around him. Many, in the generation now nearly passed away, long and tenderly remembered the little figure, placed motionless in the centre of a brilliant circle—all clever men and charming women—yet of whose notice the cleverest and most charming were always proud. Not because he was an Earl,—nobility were plentiful enough at Edinburgh then,—but because he was himself. It was a pleasure just to sit beside him, and to meet his pleasantness with cheerful chat, gay banter, or affectionate earnestness.

For everybody loved him. Women, of course, did; they could not help it: but men

were drawn to him likewise, with the sort of reverential tenderness that they would feel towards a suffering child or woman — and something more — intense respect. His high sense of honour, his true manliness, attracted the best of all the notabilities then constituting that brilliant set; and there was not one of them worth having for a friend at all, who was not, in greater or less degree, the friend of the Earl of Cairnforth.

But there was another side of his Edinburgh life which did not appear till long after he had quitted Modern Athens for ever — nor even then fully: not until he had passed quite away from the comments of this mortal world. Then, many a struggling author, or worn-out professional man, to whom life was all up-hill, or to whom

sudden misfortune had made the handful of "siller" a matter of absolute salvation to both body and soul—scores of such as these afterwards recalled hours or half-hours spent in the cosy study in Charlotte Square, beside the little figure in its chair—outwardly capable of so little, yet endowed with both the power and will to do so much. Doing it so generously, too, and withal so delicately, that the most sensitive went away with their pride unwounded, and the most hardened and irreligious were softened by it into thankfulness to One higher than their earthly benefactor,—who was only the medium through whom the blessings came.

These were accidental offices, intermingled with the principal duty which the Earl had undertaken, and which he

carried out with unremitting diligence—the care of his old friend's children. He placed some at school, and others at college; those who were already afloat in the world he aided with money and influence—an Earl's name was so very influential, as, with an amused smile, he occasionally discovered.

But, busy as his new life was, he never forgot his old life and his old friends. He turned a deaf ear to all persuasions to take up his permanent abode, according as his rank and fortune warranted, in Edinburgh. He was not unhappy there—he had plenty to do and to enjoy:—but his heart was in quiet Cairnforth. Several times, troublesome, and even painful, as the act of penman-


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a dozen letter
him once only
telling him she was doing everything as

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she thought he would best like,—that Captain Bruce had assisted her and her father in many ways, so far as his health allowed, but he was very delicate still, and talked of going abroad, to the south of France probably, as soon as possible. The Captain himself never wrote one single line.

At first the Earl was a little surprised at this: however, it was not his habit easily to take offence at his friends. He was quite without that morbid self-esteem which is always imagining affronts or injuries. If people liked him, he was glad — if they showed it, he believed them, and rested in their affection with the simple faith of a child. But if they seemed to neglect him, he still was ready



to conclude the slight was accidental ; and he rarely grieved over it. Mere acquaintances had not the power to touch his heart. And this gentle heart, which, liking many, loved but few, none whom he loved ever could really offend. He

“ Grappled them to his soul with hooks of steel,”

and believed in them to the last extremity of faith that was possible.

So, whether Captain Bruce came under the latter category or the former, his conduct was passed over, waiting for future explanation when Lord Cairnforth returned home ; as now, every day, he was wearying to do.

“ But I will be back again in pleasant Edinburgh next winter,” said he,

to one of his new friends, who had helped to make his stay pleasant, and was sorely regretting his departure. "And I shall bring with me some very old friends of mine, who will enjoy it as much as I shall myself."

And he planned, and even made preliminary arrangements, for a house to be taken, and an establishment formed, where the minister, Helen, and indeed all the Cardross family if they chose, might find a hospitable home for the ensuing winter season.

"And how they will like it!" said he, in talking it over with Malcolm one day. "How the minister will bury himself in old libraries, and Miss Cardross will admire the grand shops and the beau-

tiful views! And how the boys will go skating on Dunsappie Loch, and golfing over Bruntsfield Links! Oh, we'll make them all so happy!" added he — with pleasure shining in those contented eyes, which drew half their light from the joy that they saw, and caused to shine, in the eyes around him.

It was after many days of fatiguing travel that Lord Cairnforth reached the ferry, opposite Cairnforth.

There the Castle stood, just as he had left it, its white front gleaming against the black woods — then yellow and brown with autumn — but now only black, or with a faint umber shadow running through them, preparatory to the green of spring. Between, lay the beautiful loch — looking ten times more beautiful than ever to

eyes which had not seen it for many long months. How it danced and dimpled — as it had done before the squall in which the Earl's father was drowned, and as it would do, many a time again, after the fashion of these lovely, deceitful lochs, — and of many other things in this world.

“ Oh, Malcolm, it's good to be at home ! ” said the Earl, as he gazed fondly at his white Castle-walls, at the ivy-covered kirk, and the gable end of the Manse. He had been happy in Edinburgh, but it was far sweeter to come back to the dear old friends that loved him. He seemed as if he had never before felt how dear they were, and how indispensable to his happiness.

“You are quite sure, Malcolm, that nobody knows we are coming? I wished to go down at once to the Manse, and surprise them all.”

“Ye’ll easy do that, my Lord, for there’s naebody in sight but Sandy the ferryman, wha little kens it’s the Earl himsel he’s keepit waiting sae lang.”

“And how’s a’ wi’ ye, Sandy?” said Lord Cairnforth, cheerily — when the old man was rowing him across. “All well at home — at the Castle — the Manse, and the clachan?”

“Ou ay, my Lord. Except maybe the minister. He’s no weel. He’s missing Miss Helen sair.”

“Missing Miss Helen!” echoed the Earl, turning pale.

“Ay, my Lord. She gaed awa;—it’s just twa days sin syne. She was sair vexed to leave Cairnforth, and the minister.”

“Leave her father?”

“A man maun leave father and mither and cleave unto his wife—the Scripture says it. And a woman maun just do the like for her man, ye ken. Miss Helen’s awa to France, or some sic place, wi’ her husband, Captain Bruce.”

The Earl was sitting in the stern of the ferry-boat, alone; no one being near him but Sandy, and Malcolm, who had taken the second oar. To old Sandy’s communication he replied not a word—asked not a single question

more — and was lifted out at the end of the five-minutes' passage just as usual. But the two men, though they also said nothing, remembered the expression of his face to their dying day.

"Take me home, Malcolm; I will go to the Manse another time. 'Carry me in your arms — the quickest way."

Malcolm lifted his master, and carried him, just as in the days when the Earl was a child, through the pleasant woods of Cairnforth, up to the Castle-door.

Nobody had expected them; and there was nothing ready.

"It's no matter,—no matter," feebly said the Earl, and allowed himself to be placed in an arm-chair by the fire in the housekeeper's room. There he sat passive.

“Will I bring the minister?” whispered Malcolm, respectfully. “Maybe ye wad like to see him, my Lord!”

“No, no.”

“His lordship’s no weel pleased,” said the housekeeper to Mrs. Campbell, when the Earl leant his head back, and seemed to be sleeping. “Is it about the Captain’s marriage? Did he no ken?”

“Ne’er a word o’t.”

“That was great lack o’ respect on the part o’ Captain Bruce, and he sic a pleasant young man; and Miss Helen, too. Miss Helen tauld me her ain sel that the Earl was greatly set upon her marriage, for the Captain gaed to Edinburgh just to tell him o’t. And he wrote her

word that his lordship wished him no to bide a single day, but to marry Miss Helen and tak her awa. She'd never hae done it—in my opinion, but for that. For the Captain was at her ilka day an' a' day lang, looking like a ghaist, and tellin' her he couldna live without her, —and she's a tender heart, Miss Helen — and she was awfu' vexed for him, ye ken. For sure, Malcolm, the Captain did seem almost like deein'."

"Deein'!" cried Malcolm, contemptuously, and then stopped. For while they were talking the Earl's eyes had opened wide and fixed with a strange, sad, terrified look upon vacancy.

He remembered it all now — the last night he had spent at Cairnforth with

his cousin — the conversation which passed between them — the questions asked, which, from his not answering, might have enabled the Captain to guess at the probable disposal of his property. He could come to no other conclusion than that Captain Bruce had married Helen with the same motive which must have induced his appearance at the Castle, and his eager and successful efforts to ingratiate himself there — namely, money ; that the fortune which he had himself missed might accrue to him through his union with Lord Cairnforth's heiress.


How had he possibly accomplished this ? How had he succeeded in making good, innocent, simple Helen love him — for that

Whatever emotions the Earl felt—and it would be almost sacrilegious to intrude upon them, or to venture on any idle speculation concerning them—one thing was clear; in losing Helen, the light of his eyes, the delight of his life, was gone.

He sat in his chair—quite still; as indeed he always was—but now it was a deathlike quietness, without the least sign of that wonderful mobility of feature and cheerfulness of voice and manner which made people so soon grow used to his infirmity—sat until his room was prepared. Then he suffered himself to be carried to his bed; which, for the first time in his life, he refused to leave—for several days.

Not that he was ill — he declined any medical help, and declared that he was only “weary, weary” — at which, after his long journey, no one was surprised. He refused to see anybody, even Mr. Cardross, and would suffer no one beside him but his old nurse, Mrs. Campbell, whom he seemed to cling to as when he was a little child. For hours she sat by his bed, watching him, but scarcely speaking a word; and for hours he lay, his eyes wide open, but with that blank expression in them which Mrs. Campbell had first noticed when he sat by the housekeeper’s fire.

“My bairn, my bairn!” was all she said — for she was a very simple woman — but she loved him. And somehow, her



love comforted him. "Ye maun live, ye maun live. Maybe they 'll need ye yet," sobbed she, without explaining — perhaps without knowing — who "they" meant. But she knew enough of her "bairn" to know that if anything would rouse him it was the thought of other folk.

"Do you think so, nurse? Do you think I can be of any good to any creature in this world?"

"Ay, ye can, ye can, my Lord — ye'd be awfully missed gin ye were to dee."

"Then I'll no dee," — faintly smiling, and using the familiar speech of his childhood. "Call Malcolm. I'll try to rise. And, nurse, if you would have the carriage ordered — the pony carriage — I will drive down to the Manse and see

how Mr. Cardross is. He must be rather dull, without his daughter."

The Earl did not—and it was long before he did—call her by her name. But after that day he always spoke of her as usual, to everybody. And from that hour he rose from his bed, and went about his customary work, in his customary manner; taking up all his duties as if he had never left them, and as if nothing had ever happened to disturb the even tenor of his life—the strange, peaceful, and yet busy life led by the solitary master of Cairnforth.






Chapter the Second.

VOL. II.

D



T happened that, both this day and the day following, Mr. Cardross was absent on one of his customary house-to-house visitings in remote corners of his parish. So the Earl, before meeting Helen's father, had time to hear from other sources all particulars about her marriage; at least all that were known to the little world of Cairnforth.

The minister himself had scarcely more to communicate, except the fact, of which he seemed perfectly certain, that her absence would not exceed six months, when

Captain Bruce had faithfully promised to come back and live upon his half-pay in the little peninsula. Otherwise, Mr. Cardross was confident his "dear lassie" would never have left her father for any man alive.

It was a marriage, externally, both natural and suitable, the young couple being of equal age and circumstances, and withal tolerably well acquainted with one another; for it appeared the Captain had begun daily visits to the Manse from the very day of Lord Cairnforth's departure.

"And he always spoke so warmly of you, expressed such gratitude towards you, such admiration of you: I think it was that which won Helen's heart. And

when he did ask her to marry him, she would not accept him for a good while, not till after he had seen you in Edinburgh."

"Seen me in Edinburgh!" repeated the Earl, amazed; and then suddenly stopped himself. It was necessary for Helen's sake, for everybody's sake, to be cautious over every word he said: to arrive at full confirmation of his suspicions, before he put into the poor father's heart one doubt that Helen's marriage was not as happy or as honourable as the minister evidently believed it to be.

"He told us you seemed so well," continued Mr. Cardross; "that you were in the very whirl of Edinburgh society, and delighted in it; that you had said to

him that nothing could be more to your mind than this marriage, and that if it could be carried out without waiting for your return, which was so very uncertain, you would be all the happier. Was not that true?"

"No," said the Earl.

"You wish she had waited till your return?"

"Yes."

The minister looked sorry; but still he evidently had not the slightest suspicion that aught was amiss.

"You must forgive my girl," said he. "She meant no disrespect to her dear old friend; but messages are so easily misconstrued. And then, you see, a lover's impatience must be considered. We must

excuse Captain Bruce, I think. No wonder he was eager to get our Helen."

And the old man smiled, rather sadly, and looked wistfully round the Manse parlour, whence the familiar presence had gone, and yet seemed lingering still — in her flower-stand, her little table, her work-basket; for Mr. Cardross would not have a single article moved. "She will like to see them all when she comes back again," said he.

"And you — were you quite satisfied with the marriage?" asked the Earl, making his question and the tone of it as commonplace and cautious as he could.


"Why not? Helen loved him; and I loved Helen. Besides, my own married

life was so happy: God forbid I should grudge any happiness to my children! I knew nothing but good of the lad; and you liked him, too: Helen told me you had specially charged her, if ever she had an opportunity, to be kind to him."

Lord Cairnforth almost groaned.

"Captain Bruce declared you must have said it because you knew of his attachment, which he had not had courage to express before, but had rather appeared to slight her, to hide his real feelings, until he was assured of your consent."

The Earl listened, utterly struck dumb. The lies were so plausible, so systematic, so ingeniously fitted together, that he could almost have deluded himself into



supposing them truth. No wonder, then, that they had deluded simple Helen, and her even simpler and more unworldly father.

And now the cruel question presented itself, how far the father was to be undeceived ?

The Earl was, both by nature and circumstances, a reserved character ; that is, he did not believe in the duty of everybody to tell out everything. Helen often argued with him, and even laughed at him, for this ; but he only smiled silently, and held to his own opinion, taught by experience. He knew well that her life—her free, open, happy life—was not like his life, and never could be. She had yet to learn that bitter but salutary self-restraint, which if it has

to suffer, often, for others' sake as well as for its own, prefers to suffer alone.

But Lord Cairnforth had learnt this to the full. Otherwise, as he sat in the Manse parlour, listening patiently to Helen's father, and in the newness and suddenness of her loss, and the strong delusion of his own fond fancy, imagining every minute he heard her step on the stair, and her voice in the hall, — he must have utterly broken down.

He did not do so. He maintained his righteous concealment, his noble deceit, — if that was deceit, which consisted only in silence, — to the very last; spending the whole evening with Mr. Cardross, and quitting him without having betrayed a word of what he dreaded — what he was almost sure of.

Though the marriage might be, and no doubt was, a perfectly legal and creditable marriage in the eye of the world, still, in the eyes of honest men, it would be deemed altogether unworthy and unfortunate, and he knew the minister would think it so. How could he tell the poor old father, who had so generously given up his only daughter for the one simple reason,—sufficient reason for any righteous marriage—“Helen loved him,” that his new son-in-law was proved, by proof irresistible, to be a deliberate liar, a selfish, scheming, mercenary knave?

So, under this heavy responsibility, Lord Cairnforth decided to do what, in minor matters, he had often noticed Helen do, towards her gentle and easily wounded

father — to lay upon him no burdens greater than he could bear, but to bear them herself for him. And in this instance the Earl's only means of so doing, for the present at least, was by taking refuge in that last haven of wounded love and cruel suffering — silence.

The Earl determined to maintain a silence, unbroken as the grave, regarding all the past, and his own relations with Captain Bruce. That is, until he saw the necessity for doing otherwise.

One thing, however, smote his heart with a sore pang — which, after a week or so, he could not entirely conceal from Mr. Cardross. Had Helen left him — him, her friend from childhood — no message, no

letter? Had her happy love so completely blotted out old ties, that she could go away without one word of farewell to him?

The minister thought not. He was sure she had written: she had said she should, the night before her marriage, and he had heard her moving about in her room, and even sobbing, he fancied, long after the house was gone to rest. Nay, he felt sure he had seen her on her wedding-morning give a letter to Captain Bruce, saying, "It was to be posted to Edinburgh."

"Where, you know, we all believed you then were, and would remain for some time. Otherwise I am sure my child would have waited; that you might

have been present at her marriage. And to think you should have come back the very next day! She will be so sorry!"

"Do you think so?" said the Earl, sadly—and said no more.

But, on his return to the Castle, he saw lying on his study-table a letter, in the round, firm, rather boyish hand, familiar to him as that of his faithful amanuensis of many years.

"It's surely frae Miss Helen, Mrs. Bruce that is," said Malcolm, lifting it. "But, folk in love are less mindfu' than ordinar. She's directed it to Charlotte Square, Edinburgh,—and then carried it up to London wi' hersel—and some other body, the Captain, I think, has re-directed it to Cairnforth Castle."

“No remarks, Malcolm,” interrupted the Earl, with unwonted sharpness. “Break the seal, and lay the letter so that I can read it. Then you may go.”

But, when his servant had gone, he closed his eyes, in utter hopelessness of dejection, for he saw how completely Helen had been deceived.

Her letter ran thus—her poor, innocent letter—dated ever so long ago:—indeed the time when she had told her father she should write—the night before her marriage-day:—

“My dear Friend,—

“I am very busy; but have striven hard to find an hour in which to write to you, for I do not think people

forget their friends because they have gotten other people to be mindful of, too. I think a good and happy love only makes other loves feel closer and dearer. I am sure I have been greeting like a bairn, twenty times a-day, ever since I knew I was to be married, whenever I called to mind you and my dear father. You will be very good to him while I am away? but I need not ask you that. Six months, he says—I mean Captain Bruce—will, according to the Edinburgh doctor's advice, set up his health entirely, if he travels about in a warm climate. And, therefore, by June, your birthday, we are sure to be back in dear old Cairnforth—to live there for the rest of our days; for he

declares he likes no other place half so well.

“I am right to go with him for these six months—am I not?—But I need not ask—you sent me word so yourself. He had nobody to take care of him—nobody in the world but me. His sisters are gay, lively girls, he says—and he has been so long abroad that they are almost strangers. He tells me, I might as well send him away to die at once, unless I went with him as his wife. So I go.

“I hope he will come home quite strong and well, and able to begin building our cottage on that wee bit of ground on the hill-side above Cairnforth, which you have promised to give to him. I

am inexpressibly happy about it. We shall all live so cheerily together — and meet every day — the Castle, the Manse, and the Cottage. When I think of that, and of my coming back, I am almost comforted for this sad going away — leaving my dear father, and the boys, and you.

“Papa has been so good to me, you do not know. I shall never forget it — nor will Ernest. Ernest thought he would stand in the way of our marriage, but he did not. He said I must choose for myself, as he had done when he married my dearest mother; that I had been a good girl to him — and a good daughter would make a good wife; also that a good wife would not cease to be a good daughter because she was married — especially living

close at hand, as we shall always live : Ernest has promised it.

“Thus, you see, nobody I love will lose me at all — nor shall I forget them — I should hate myself if it were possible. I shall be none the less a daughter to my father — none the less a friend to you. I will never, never forget you, my dear!” (here the writing became blurred, as if large drops had fallen on the paper while she wrote.) “It is twelve o’clock, and I must bid you good night—and God bless you ever and ever! The last time I sign my dear old name (except once) is thus to you.

“Your faithful and loving friend,

“HELEN CARDROSS.”

Thus she had written, and thus he sat and read—these two, who had been and were so very dear to one another. Perhaps the good angels, who watch over human lives and human destinies, might have looked with pity upon both.

As for Helen's father, and Helen herself too, if (as some severe judges may say) they erred in suffering themselves to be thus easily deceived; in believing a man upon little more than his own testimony, and in loving him as bad men are sometimes loved, under a strong delusion, by even good women,—surely the errors of unworldliness, unselfishness, and that large charity which “thinketh no evil,” are not so common in this world as to be quite un-

pardonable. Better, tenfold, to be sinned against than sinning.

“ Better trust all, and be deceived,

And weep that trust and that deceiving,

Than doubt one heart which, if believed,

Had blest one's life with true believing.”

Lord Cairnforth did not think this at the time, but he learned to do so afterwards. He learned, when time brought round its divine *amende*, neither to reproach himself so bitterly, nor to blame others: and he knew it was better to accept any sad earthly lot, any cruelty, deceit, or wrong inflicted by others, than to have been himself the evil-doer, or to have hardened his heart against any living soul, by acts of causeless suspicion or deliberate injustice.

Meanwhile, the marriage was accomplished. All that Helen's fondest friend could do was to sit and watch the event of things—as the Earl determined to watch: silently, but with a vigilance that never slept. Not passively neither. He took immediate steps, by means which his large fortune and now wide connexion easily enabled him to employ, to find out exactly the position of Helen's husband, both his present circumstances, and, so far as was possible, his antecedents, at home or abroad. For, after the discovery of so many atrocious, deliberate lies, every fact that Captain Bruce had stated concerning himself remained open to doubt.

However, the lies were apparently that sort of falsehood which springs from a

brilliant imagination, a lax conscience, and a ready tongue; prone to say whatever comes easiest and uppermost. Also, because probably, following the not uncommon jesuitical doctrine that the end justifies the means, he had, for whatever reason he best knew, determined to marry Helen Cardross, and had taken his own measures accordingly.


The main facts of his self-told history turned out to be correct. He was certainly the identical Ernest Henry Bruce, only surviving son of Colonel Bruce, and had undoubtedly been in India—a captain in the Company's service. His medals were veritable also: won by creditable bravery. No absolute moral turpitude could be discovered concerning him: only a careless, reckless life; an utter indifference to

debt: and a convenient readiness to live upon other people's money rather than earn his own. Qualities, not so rare, or so sharply judged in the world at large, as they were likely to be by the little world of innocent, honest Cairnforth.

And yet he was young — he had married a good wife — he might mend. At present, plain and indisputable, his character stood; good-natured, kindly — perhaps not even unloveable; but destitute of the very foundations of all that constitutes worth in a man — or woman either — truthfulness, independence, honour, honesty. And he was Helen's husband — Helen, the true and the good; the poor minister's daughter who had been brought up to think that it was better to starve upon

porridge and salt than to owe any one a half-penny! What sort of a marriage could it possibly turn out to be?

To this question, which Lord Cairnforth asked himself continually, in an agony of doubt, no answer came. No clue whatsoever. Though, from even the first week, Helen's letters reached the Manse as regularly as clock-work. But they were mere outside letters — very sweet and loving—telling her father every thing that could interest him about foreign places, persons, and things; only of herself and her own feelings saying almost nothing. It was unlikely she should: the Earl laid this comfort to his soul twenty times a day. She was



married now: she could not be expected to be frank as in her girlhood: still this total silence, so unnatural to her candid disposition, alarmed him.

But there was no resource, no help. Into that secret chamber which her own hand thus barred, no other hand could presume to break. No one could say — ought to say to a wife, “Your husband is a scoundrel.”

And besides (to this hope Lord Cairnforth clung with a desperation heroic as bitter), Captain Bruce might not be an irredeemable scoundrel. And he might — there was still a chance — have married Helen not altogether from interested motives. She was so loveable that he might have loved her — or have grown to love

her, even though he had slighted her at first.

“He must have loved her — he could not help it,” groaned the Earl, inwardly, when the minister and others stabbed him from time to time with little episodes of the courting days, — the Captain’s devotedness to Helen, and Helen’s surprised, fond delight at being so much “made of” by the first lover who had ever wooed her, and a lover whom externally any girl would have been proud of. And then the agonized cry of another faithful heart went up to heaven — “God grant he may love her — that she may be happy — anyhow — anywhere !”

But all this while, with the almost morbid prevision of his character, Lord

Cairnforth took every precaution that Helen should be guarded, as much as was possible, in case there should befall her that terrible calamity, the worst that can happen to a woman — of being compelled to treat the husband and father, the natural protector, helper, and guide of herself and her children, as not only her own, but *their* natural enemy.

The Earl did not cancel Helen's name from his will: he let everything stand as before her marriage; but he took the most sedulous care to secure her fortune unalienably to herself and her offspring. This, because, if Captain Bruce were honest, such precaution could not affect him in the least: man and wife are one flesh — settlements were a mere form, which love would


only smile at, and at which any honourable man must be rather glad than otherwise. But if her husband were dishonourable — Helen was made safe — so far as worldly matters went; safe: except for the grief from which, alas! no human friend can protect another — a broken heart!

Was her heart broken, or breaking?


The Earl could not tell, nor even guess. She left them at home not a loop-hole whereby to form a conjecture. Her letters came regularly — from January until May: dated from all sorts of German towns, chiefly gambling towns, — but the innocent dwellers at Cairnforth (save the Earl) did not know this fact. They were sweet, fond letters as ever — mindful, with a pathetic minuteness, of everybody and everything

at the dear, old home — but not a complaint was breathed: not a murmur of regret concerning her marriage. She wrote very little of her husband: gradually, Lord Cairnforth fancied, less and less. They had not been to the south of France as was ordered by the physicians, and intended. He preferred, she said, these German towns: where he met his own family — his father and sisters. Of these, — as even the minister himself at length noticed with surprise, Helen gave no description, favourable or otherwise; indeed, did not say of her husband's kindred, beyond the bare fact that she was living with them, one single word.

Eagerly the Earl scanned her letters — those long letters, which Mr. Cardross



brought up immediately to the Castle, and then circulated their contents round the whole parish, with the utmost glee and pride — for the whole parish was in its turn dying to hear news of “Miss Helen.” Still, nothing could be discovered of her real life and feelings. And at last her friend’s fever of uneasiness calmed down a little: he contented himself with still keeping a constant watch over all her movements — speaking to no one, trusting no one — except so far as he was obliged to trust the old clerk who was once sent down by Mr. Menteith, and who had now come to end his days at Cairnforth, in the position of the Earl’s private secretary — as faithful and fond as a dog, and as safely silent.



So wore the time away—as it wears on with all of us, through joy and sorrow—absence or presence—with cheerful fullness or aching emptiness of heart. It brought spring back—and summer;—the sunshine to the hills, and the leaves, and flowers, and birds to the woods: it brought the Earl's birthday—kept festively as ever by his people, who loved him better every year. But it did not bring Helen home to Cairnforth.



. Chapter the Third.

VOL. II.

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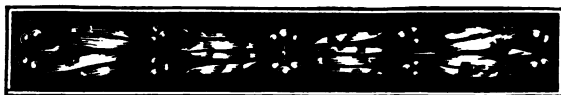
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IFE, when we calmly analyse it, is made up to us all alike, of three simple elements—joy, sorrow, and work. Some of us get tolerably equal proportions of each of these; some unequal—or we fancy so—but in reality, as the ancient sage says truly, “the same things come alike to all.”

The Earl of Cairnforth, in his imperfect fragment of a life, had had little enough of enjoyment; but he knew how to endure better than most people. He had, however, still to learn that existence



is not wholly endurance: that a complete human life must have in it not only submission but resistance; the fighting against evil and in defence of good; the struggle with divine help to overcome evil with good: and finally the determination not to sit down tamely to misery, but to strive after happiness — lawful happiness, both for ourselves and others. In short, not only passively to accept joy or grief, but to take means to secure the one and escape the other: to “work out our own salvation,” for each day, as we are told to do it for an eternity. Though with the same divine limitation — humbling to all pride, and yet encouraging to ceaseless effort — “for it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.”



That self-absorption of loss, which follows all great anguish: that shrinking up unto oneself, which is the first and most natural instinct of a creature smitten with a sorrow not unmingled with cruel wrong—is, with most high natures, only temporary. By-and-by comes the merciful touch which says to the lame, “Arise and walk,” to the sick, “Take up thy bed and go into thine house.” And the whisper of peace is, almost invariably, a whisper of labour and effort: there is not only something to be suffered, but something to be done.

With the Earl this state was longer in coming, because the prior collapse did not come to him at once. The excitement of perpetual expectation — the preparing for some catastrophe, which he felt sure

was to follow, and the incessant labour entailed by his wide inquiries, in which he had no confidant but Mr. Mearns, the clerk, and him he trusted as little as possible, lest any suspicion or disgrace should fall upon Helen's husband — all this kept him in a state of unnatural activity and strength.

But when the need for action died away; when Helen's letters betrayed nothing; and when, though she did not return, and while expressing most bitter regret, yet gave sufficiently valid reasons for not returning in her husband's still delicate health,—after June, Lord Cairnforth fell into a condition, less of physical than mental sickness, which lasted a long time, and was very painful to himself,

as well as to those that loved him. He was not ill—but his usual amount of strength—so small always!—became much reduced; neither was he exactly irritable—his sweet temper never could sink into irritability—but he was, as Malcolm expressed it, “dour:” difficult to please: easily fretted about trifles: inclined to take sad and cynical views of things.


This might have been increased by certain discoveries which, during the summer, when he came to look into his affairs, Lord Cairnforth made. He found that monies, which he had intrusted to Captain Bruce for various purposes, had been appropriated, or mis-appropriated, in different ways. Conduct scarcely exposing the young man to legal investigation, and capable

of being explained away as “carelessness” — “unpunctuality in money matters” — and so on; but conduct of which no strictly upright, honourable person would ever have been guilty. This fact also accounted for another — the Captain’s having expressed ardent gratitude for a sum which he said the Earl had given him for his journey and marriage expenses, which, though Mr. Cardross’s independent spirit rather revolted from the gift, at least satisfied him about Helen’s comfort during her temporary absence. And once more, for Helen’s sake, the Earl kept silence. But he felt as if every good and tender impulse of his nature were hardening into stone.

Hardened at the core Lord Cairnforth

could never be: no man can whose heart has once admitted into its deepest sanctuary the love of. One who, when all human loves fail, still whispers, "We will come in unto him, and make our abode with him:"—ay, be it the forlornest bodily tabernacle in which immortal soul ever dwelt. But there came an outer crust of hardness over his nature which was years before it quite melted away. Common observers might not perceive it — Mr. Cardross even did not: still it was there.

- The thing was inevitable. Right or wrong, deservedly or undeservedly, most of us have at different crises of our lives, known this feeling; the bitter sense of being wronged: of having



opened one's heart to the sunshine, and had it all blighted and blackened with frost: of having laid oneself down in a passion of devotedness for beloved feet to walk upon — and been trampled upon, and beaten down to the dust. And as months slipped by, and there came no Helen, this feeling, even against his will and his conscience, grew very much upon Lord Cairnforth. In time it might have changed him to a bitter, suspicious, disappointed cynic, had there not also come to him, with strong conviction, one truth — a truth preached on the shores of Galilee, eighteen hundred years ago — the only truth that can save the wronged heart from breaking: — that he who gives away only a cup of cold water shall in no wise

lose his reward. Still, the reward is not temporal, and is rarely reward in kind. He — and He alone — to whom the debt is due, repays it: not in ours, but in His own way. One only consolation remains to the sufferers from ingratitude, but that one is all-sufficing, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these little ones, ye have done it unto Me.”

All autumn, winter, and during another spring and summer, Helen’s letters — most fond, regular, and (to her father) satisfactory letters — contained incessant and eager hopes of return, which were never fulfilled. And gradually she ceased to give any reason for their non-fulfilment, simply saying, with a

sad brevity of silence, which one, at least, of her friends knew how to comprehend and appreciate, that her coming home at present was "impossible."

"It's very true," said the good minister, disappointed as he was: "a man must cleave to his wife, and a woman to her husband. I suppose the Captain finds himself better in warm countries — he always said so. My bairn will come back when she can — I know she will. And the boys are very good — specially Duncan."

For Mr. Cardross had now, he thought, discovered germs of ability in his youngest boy, and was concentrating all his powers in educating

him for college and the ministry. This, and his growing absorption in his books; reconciled him more than might have been expected, to his daughter's absence. Or else the inevitable necessity of things, which, as we advance in years, becomes so strange and consoling an influence over us, was working slowly upon the good old minister. He did not seem heart-broken, or even heart-wounded—he did his parish work with unfailing diligence; but as, Sunday after Sunday, he passed from the Manse-garden through the kirk-yard, where, green and moss-covered now, was the one white stone which bore the name of “Helen Lindsay, wife of the Reverend Alexander Cardross,” he was often seen

to glance at it less sorrowfully than smilingly. Year by year, the world and its cares were lessening and slipping away from him—as they had long since slipped from her who once shared them all. She now waited for him in that eternal reunion which the marriage union teaches, as perhaps none other can, to realize as a living fact and natural necessity.

But it was different with the Earl. Sometimes, in an agony of bitterness, he caught himself blaming her—Helen—whom her old father never blamed: wondering how much she had found out of her husband's conduct and character: speculating whether it was possible to touch pitch and not be defiled: and whether the wife of Captain Bruce had become in

any way different from, and inferior to, innocent Helen Cardross.

Lord Cairnforth had never answered her letter,—he could not, without being a complete hypocrite; and she had not written again. He did not expect it: scarcely wished it—and yet the blank was sore. More and more he withdrew from all but necessary associations: shutting himself up in the Castle for weeks together:—neither reading, nor talking much to any one, but sitting quite still—he always sat quite still!—by the fireside, in his little chair. He felt creeping over him that deadness to external things which makes pain itself seem comparatively almost sweet. Once he was heard to say, looking wistfully at Mrs. Campbell, who had

been telling him, with many tears, of a "freend o' hers" who had just died, down at the clachan,— "Nurse, I wish I could greet like you."

The first thing which broke up in his heart this bitter, blighting frost was, as so often happens, the sharp-edged blow of a new trouble.

He had not been at the Manse for two or three weeks, and had not even heard of the family for several days, when, looking up from his seat in church, he was startled by the apparition of an unfamiliar face in the pulpit—a voluble, flowery-tongued, foolish young assistant—evidently caught haphazard to fill the place which Mr. Cardross, during a long term of years,

had never vacated, except at communion seasons. It gave his faithful friend and pupil a sensation almost of pain to see any new figure there, and not the dear old minister's — with his long, white hair, his earnest manner, and his simple, short sermon. Shorter and simpler the older he grew, till he often declared he should end by preaching like the beloved Apostle John; who, tradition says, in his latter days, did nothing but repeat, over and over again, to all around him, his one exhortation — he, the disciple whom Jesus loved — “Little children, love one another.”

On inquiry after service, the Earl found that Mr. Cardross had been ailing all

week; and had had on Saturday to procure in haste this substitute. But on going to the Manse, the Earl found him much as usual — only complaining of a numbness in his arm.

“And,” he said, with a composure very different from his usual nervousness, about the slightest ailment, “now I remember, my mother died of paralysis. I wish Helen would come home.”

“Shall she be sent for?” suggested Lord Cairnforth.

“Oh, no — not the least necessity. Besides, she says she is coming.”

“She has long said that.”

“But now she is determined to make the strongest effort to be with us at the New Year. Read her letter — it came

yesterday: a week later than usual. I should have sent it up to the Castle, for it troubled me a little, especially the postscript—can you make it out?—part of it is under the seal. It is in answer to what I told her of Duncan—he was always her pet, you know. How she used to carry him about the garden—even when he grew quite a big boy. Poor Helen!”

While the minister went on talking, feebly and wandringly, in a way that at another time would have struck the Earl as something new and rather alarming, Lord Cairnforth eagerly read the letter. It ended thus:—

“Tell Dinnie I am awfully glad he is to be a minister. I hope all my

brothers will settle down in dear, old Scotland, work hard, and pay their way like honest men. And bid them, as soon as ever they can, to marry honest women — good, loving Scotch lassies — no fremd folk. Tell them never to fear for ‘poortith cauld,’ as Mr. Burns wrote about — it’s easy to bear — when it’s honest poverty. I would rather see my five brothers living on porridge and milk — wives and weans and all — than see them like these foreigners — counts, barons, and princes, though they be. Father, I hate them all. And I mind always the way I was brought up, and that I was once a minister’s daughter in dear and bonnie Cairnforth.”

“What can she mean by that?” said

Mr. Cardross, watching anxiously the Earl's countenance as he read.

"I suppose, what Helen always means, exactly what she says."

"That is true. You know, we used always to say, Helen could hold her tongue,—though it wasn't easy to her, the dear lassie:—but she could not say what was not the fact, nor even give the impression of it. Therefore, if she were unhappy, she would have told me?"

This was meant as a question, but it gained no answer.

"Surely," entreated the father, anxiously; "surely you do not think the lassie is unhappy?"

"This is not a very happy world," said the Earl, sadly. "But I do be-

lieve that, if anything had been seriously wrong with her, Helen would have told us."

He spoke his real belief. But he did not speak of a dread far deeper—which had sometimes occurred to him—but which that sad and even bitter postscript now removed—that circumstances could change character, and that Helen Cardross and Helen Bruce were two different women.

As he went home, having arranged to come daily every forenoon to sit with the minister, and to read a little Greek with Duncan, lest the lad's studies should be interrupted, he decided that, in her father's state, which appeared to him the more serious the longer he considered it, it was right Helen should come home, and somebody, not Mr. Cardross, ought to

urge it upon her. He determined to do this himself. And lest means should be wanting — though of this he had no reason to fear — his information from all quarters having always been that the Bruce family lived more than well — luxuriously — he resolved to offer a gift with which he had not before dared to think of insulting independent Helen — money.

With difficulty and pains, not entrusting this secret to even his faithful secretary, he himself wrote a few lines, in his own feeble, shaky hand, telling her exactly how things were ; suggesting her coming home — and enclosing wherewithal to do it — from “her affectionate old friend and cousin,” from whom she need not hesitate to

accept anything. But though he carefully, after long consideration, signed himself her "cousin," he did not once name Captain Bruce. He could not.

This done, he waited day after day, till every chance of Helen's not having had time to reply was long over, and still no answer came. That the letter had been received was more than probable, almost certain. Every possible interpretation that common sense allowed Lord Cairnforth gave to her silence, and all failed. Then he let the question rest. To distrust her, Helen, his one pure image of perfection, was impossible. He felt it would have killed him, not his outer life perhaps, but the life of his heart, his belief in human goodness.

So he still waited, nor judged her either as daughter or friend, but contented himself with doing her apparently neglected duty for her — making himself an elder brother to Duncan, and a son to the minister, and never missing a day without spending some hours at the Manse.

For almost the first time since her departure, Helen's regular monthly letter did not arrive; and then the Earl grew seriously alarmed. In the utmost perplexity he was resolving in his own mind what next step to take; how, and how much he ought to tell of his anxieties to her father: when all difficulties were solved in the sharpest and yet easiest way, by a letter from Helen herself. A letter, so unlike Helen's, so

un-neat, blurred and blotted, that at first he did not even recognise it as hers.

“ TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL
OF CAIRNFORTH.

“ My Lord,—

“ I have only just found your letter. The money enclosed was not there. I conclude it had been used for our journey hither ; but it is gone, and I cannot come to my dearest father. My husband is very ill, and my little baby only three weeks old. Tell my father this, and send me news of him soon. Help me, for I am almost beside myself with misery !

“ Yours gratefully,

“ HELEN BRUCE.

“ — Street, Edinburgh.”

Edinburgh! Then she was come home!

The Earl had opened and read the letter with his secretary sitting by him. Yet, dull and not prone to notice things, as the old man was, he was struck by an unusual tone of something very like exultation in his master's voice as he said,—

“Mr. Mearns, call Malcolm to me, I must start for Edinburgh immediately.”

In the interval Lord Cairnforth thought rapidly over what was best to be done. To go at once to Helen—whatever her misery was—appeared to him beyond question. To take Mr. Cardross, in his present state, or the lad Duncan, was not desirable: some people, good as they may be, are not the sort of people

to be trusted in calamity. And Helen's other brothers were out and away in the world, scattered all over Scotland, earning, diligently and hardly, their daily bread.

There was evidently not a soul to go to her help, except himself. Her brief and formal letter, breaking down into that piteous cry of "help me," seemed to come out of the very depths of despair. It pierced to the core of Lord Cairnforth's heart; and yet—and yet—he felt that strange sense of exultation and delight.

Even Malcolm noticed this.

"Your Lordship has gotten gude news," said he. "Is it about Miss Helen? She's coming hame?"

"Yes. We must start for Edinburgh at once, and we'll bring her back with

us.”—He forgot for the moment the sick husband—the new-born baby—everything but Helen herself and her being close at hand.—“It’s only forty-eight hours journey to Edinburgh now—we will travel post: I am strong enough, Malcolm—set about it quickly, for it must be done.”

Malcolm knew his master too well to remonstrate. In truth, the whole household was so bewildered by this sudden exploit—for the wheels of life moved slowly enough, ordinarily, at Cairnforth—that before anybody was quite aware what had happened, the Earl and his two necessary attendants, Malcolm and Mr. Mearns—also Mrs. Campbell—Helen might want a woman with her—were travelling across country, as fast as the only fast travelling

of that era—relays of post-horses, day and night—could carry them.

Lord Cairnforth, after much thought, left Helen's letter behind, with Duncan Cardross, charging him to break the tidings gradually to the minister, and tell him that he himself was then travelling to Edinburgh with all the speed that, in those days, money, and money alone, could procure. Oh, how he felt the blessing of riches!—Now, whatever her circumstances were, or might have been, once—misery, poverty, could never afflict Helen more. He was quite determined that from the time he brought them home, his cousin and his cousin's wife should inhabit Cairnforth Castle: that, whether Captain Bruce's life proved to be long or short, worthy or un-

worthy, he should be borne with, and forgiven everything—for Helen's sake.

All the journey—sleeping or waking, day or night—Lord Cairnforth arranged or dreamed over his plans; until at ten o'clock, the second night, he found himself driving along the familiar Princes Street, with the grim Castle rock standing dark against the moonlight; while beyond, on the opposite side of what was then a morass, but is now railways and gardens, rose tier upon tier, like a fairy palace, the glittering lights of the Old Town of Edinburgh.




Chapter the Fourth.

VOL. II.

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 HE Earl reached Edinburgh late at night. Mrs. Campbell entreated him to go to bed, and not seek out the street where the Bruces lived till morning.

“For I ken the place weel,” said she, when she heard Lord Cairnforth inquiring for the address Helen had given. “It’s ane o’ thae high lands in the New Town;—a grand flat wi’ a fine ha’ door—and then ye gang up an’ up, till at the top-flat ye find a bit nest like a bird’s—and the folk living there are as ill off as a bird in winter time.”

The Earl—weary as he had been—raised his head at this, and spoke decisively, —

“Tell Malcolm to fetch a coach. I will go there to-night.”

“Eh — couldna ye bide till the morn? Ye’ll just kill yoursel’, my lamb,” cried the affectionate woman, forgetting all her respect in her affection; but Lord Cairnforth understood it, and replied in the good old Scotch, which he always kept to warm his nurse’s heart,—

“Na, na—I’ll no dee yet. Keep your heart content—we’ll all soon be safe back at Cairnforth.”

It seemed, in truth, as if an almost miraculous amount of endurance and energy had been given to that frail body—for this hour of need. The Earl’s dark eyes were

gleaming with light, and every tone of his voice was proud and manly, as the strong, manly soul, counteracting all physical infirmities, rose up for the protection of the one creature in all the world who to him had been most dear.

“ You ’ll order apartments in the hotel, nurse. See that everything is right and comfortable for Mrs. Bruce. I shall bring them back at once, if I can,” was his last word as he drove off; alone with Malcolm: he wished to have no one with him who could possibly be done without.

It was nearly midnight when they stood at the foot of the high stair — six stories high — and Captain Bruce, they learned, was inhabiting the topmost

flat. Malcolm looked at the Earl uneasily.

“The top flat! Miss Helen canna be vera weel aff, I doubt. Will I gang up and see, my Lord?”

“No; I will go myself. Carry me, Malcolm.”

And, in the old childish way, the big Highlander lifted his master up in his arms, and carried him, flight after flight, to the summit of the long dark stair. It narrowed up to a small door—very mean and shabby-looking—from the key-hole of which, when Malcolm hid his lantern, a light was seen to gleam.

“They’re no awa’ to their beds yet, my Lord. Will I knock?”

Lord Cairnforth had no time to reply,

if indeed he could have replied; for Malcolm's footsteps had been heard from within : and opening the door with an eager "Is that you, doctor?" there stood before them — in her very own likeness — Helen Cardross.

At least, a woman like enough to the former Helen to leave no doubt it was herself. But a casual acquaintance would never have recognised her.

The face, once so round and rosy, was sharp and thin; the cheek-bones stood out; the bright complexion was faded; the masses of flaxen curls — her chief beauty — were all gone; and the thin hair was drawn up close under a cap. Her dress, once the picture of neatness, was neat still: but her figure

had become gaunt and coarse, and the shabby gown hung upon her in forlorn folds, as if put on carelessly by one who had neither time nor thought to give to appearances.

She was evidently sitting up watching, and alone. The rooms which her door opened to view were only two, this topmost flat having been divided in half; and each half made into just "a but and a ben," and furnished in the meanest fashion of lodgings to let.

"Is it the doctor?" she said again, shading her light and peering down the dark stair.

"Helen!"

She recognised at once the little figure in Malcolm's arms.

“You — you ! And you have come to me — come your own self ! Oh, thank God !”

She leant against the doorway : not for weeping, she looked like one who had wept till she could weep no more, but breathing hard in heavy breaths, like sobs.

“Set me down, Malcolm, somewhere — anywhere. Then go outside.”

Malcolm obeyed, finding a broken arm-chair, and settling his master therein. Then, as he himself afterwards told the story, though not till many years after, when nothing he told about that dear master's concerns could signify any more, he “gaed awa' down and grat like a bairn.”

Lord Cairnforth sat silent, waiting till Helen had recovered herself ; Helen —

whom, however changed, he would have known among a thousand. And then, with his quick observation, he took in as much of her circumstances as was betrayed by the aspect of the room — evidently kitchen, dining-room, and bed-room in one. For at the far end, close to the door that opened into the second apartment, which seemed a mere closet, was one of those concealed beds so common in Scotland; and on it lay a figure which occasionally stirred, moaned, or coughed, but very feebly: and for the most part lay still — very still.

Its face — placed straight on the pillow, and as the fire blazed up, the sharp profile being reflected in grotesque dis-

tinctness on the wall behind — was a man's face; thin and ghastly, the skin tightly drawn over the features, as is seen in the last stage of consumption.

Lord Cairnforth had never beheld death — not in any form. But he felt, by instinct, that he was looking upon it now, or the near approach to it, in the man who lay there, too rapidly passing into unconsciousness even to notice his presence — Helen's husband, Captain Bruce.

The dreadful fascination of the sight drew his attention even from Helen herself. He sat gazing at his cousin, the man who had deceived and wronged him, and not him only, but those dearer to him than himself: the man whom, a day or two ago, he had altogether hated and despised.

He dared do neither now. A heavier hand than that of mortal justice was upon his enemy. Whatever Captain Bruce was, whatever he had been, he was now being taken away from all human judgment into the immediate presence of Him who is at once the Judge—and the Pardoner—of sinners.

Awe-struck, the Earl sat and watched the young man (for he could not be thirty yet), struck down thus in the prime of his days; carried away into the other world; while he himself, with his frail, flickering taper of a life, remained. Wherefore? At length, in a whisper, he called “Helen!” and she came and knelt beside the Earl’s chair.

“He is fast going,” said she.



“ I see that.”

“ In an hour or two, the doctor said.”

“ Then I will stay, if I may ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! ”

Helen said it quite passively, indeed her whole appearance as she moved about the room, and then took her seat by her husband's bed-side, indicated one who makes no effort either to express or to restrain grief: who has in truth suffered till she can suffer no more.

The dying man was not so near death as the doctor had thought, for after a little he fell into what seemed a natural sleep. Helen leant her head against the wall and closed her eyes. But that instant was heard from the

inner room a cry, the like of which Lord Cairnforth had never heard before, the sharp, waking cry of a very young infant.

In a moment Helen started up; her whole expression changed. And when, after a short disappearance, she re-entered the room—with her child, who had dropped contentedly asleep again, nestling to her bosom—she was perfectly transformed. No longer the plain, almost elderly woman, she had in her poor worn face the look—which makes any face young, nay lovely—the mother's look. Fate had not been altogether cruel to her; it had given her a child.

“Isn't he a bonnie bairn?” she whispered, as once again she knelt down by

Lord Cairnforth's chair, and brought the little face down, so that he could see it and touch it. He did touch it with his feeble fingers—the small soft cheek—the first baby-cheek he had ever beheld.

“It is a bonnie bairn, as you say; God bless it!” which, as she afterwards told him, was the first blessing ever breathed over the child.—“What is its name?” he asked by-and-bye, seeing she expected more notice taken of it.

“Alexander Cardross—after my father. My son is a born Scotsman too—an Edinburgh laddie. We were coming home, as fast as we could, to Cairnforth. He”—glancing towards the bed—“he wished it.”

Thus much thought for her, then, the

dying man had shown. He had been unwilling to leave his wife forlorn in a strange land. He had come "as fast as he could," that her child might be born and her husband die, at Cairnforth—at least, so the Earl supposed: nor subsequently found any reason to doubt. It was a good thing to hear then—good to remember afterwards.

For hours the Earl sat in the broken chair, with Helen and her baby opposite—watching and waiting for the end. It did not come till near morning. Once during the night Captain Bruce opened his eyes and looked about him, but either his mind was confused, or—who knows?—made clearer by the approach of death, for he evinced no sign of surprise at the Earl's

presence in the room. He only fixed upon him a long, searching, inquiring gaze, which seemed to compel an answer.

Lord Cairnforth spoke :

“Cousin, I am come to take home with me your wife and child. Are you satisfied ?”

“Yes.”

“I promise you they shall never want. I will take care of them always.”

There was a faint, assenting movement of the dying head, and then, just as Helen went out of the room with her baby, Captain Bruce followed her with his eyes, in which the Earl thought was an expression almost approaching tenderness. “Poor thing — poor thing ! her long trouble is over.”

These were the last words he ever said, for shortly afterwards he again fell into a sleep, out of which he passed quietly, and without pain, into sleep eternal. They looked at him, and he was still breathing; they looked at him a few minutes after, and he was—as Mr. Cardross would have expressed it—“away.”—Far, far, away. In His safe keeping with whom abide the souls of both the righteous and the wicked, the living and the dead.

Let Him judge him, for no one else ever did. No one ever spoke of him but as their dead *can* only be spoken of, either to or by, the widow and the fatherless.

* * * * *

Without much difficulty—for after her husband's death Helen's strength suddenly

collapsed, and she became perfectly passive in the Earl's hands, and in those of Mrs. Campbell—Lord Cairnforth learnt all he required about the circumstances of the Bruce family.

They were absolutely penniless. Helen's boy had been born only a day or two after their arrival in Edinburgh. Her husband's illness increased suddenly at the last, but he had not been quite incapacitated till she had gained a little strength, so as to be able to nurse him. But how she had done it—how then, and for many months past, she had contrived to keep body and soul together, to endure fatigue, privation, mental anguish, and physical weakness, was, according to good Mrs. Campbell, who heard and guessed a great deal more than

she chose to tell—"just wonderfu'!" It could only be accounted for by Helen's natural vigour of constitution, and by that preternatural strength and courage which Nature supplies to even the saddest form of motherhood.

And now her brief term of wifehood — she had yet not been married two years — was over for ever; and Helen Bruce was left a mother only. It was easy to see that she would be one of those women who remain such — mothers, and nothing but mothers, to the end of their days.

"She's ower young for me to say it o' her," observed Mrs. Campbell in one of the long consultations that she and the Earl held together, concerning Helen, who

was of necessity given over almost exclusively to the good woman's charge. "But ye'll see, my Lord, she will look nae mair at any mortal man. She'll just spend her days in tending that wean o' hers—and a sweet bit thing it is, ye ken:—by-and-bye she'll get blithe and bonnie again. She'll be aye gentle and kind,—and no dreary; but she'll never marry.—Puir Miss Helen! she'll be ane o' thae widows that the Apostle tells o'—that are 'widows indeed.' "

And Mrs. Campbell, who herself was one of the number, heaved a sigh—perhaps for Helen, perhaps for herself—and for one whose very name was now forgotten: who had gone down to the bottom of Loch Beg when the Earl's father was

drowned, and never afterwards been seen, living or dead, by any mortal eye.

The Earl gave no answer to his good nurse's gossip. He contented himself with making all arrangements for poor Helen's comfort, taking care that she should be supplied with every luxury befitting not alone Captain Bruce's wife and Mr. Cardross's daughter, but the "cousin" of the Earl of Cairnforth. And now, whenever he spoke of her, it was invariably and punctiliously as "my cousin."

The baby too—Mrs. Campbell's truly feminine soul was exalted to infinite delight and pride at being employed by the Earl to procure the most magnificent stock of baby-clothes that Edinburgh could

supply. No young heir to a peerage could be apparelled more splendidly than was, within a few days, Helen's boy. He was the admiration of the whole hotel—and when his mother made some weak resistance, she received a gentle message to the effect that the Earl of Cairnforth begged, as a special favour, to be allowed to do exactly as he liked with his little “cousin.”

And every morning, punctual to the hour, the Earl had himself taken upstairs into the infantile kingdom of which Mrs. Campbell was installed once more as head-nurse—where he would sit watching with an amused curiosity, that was not without its pathos, the little creature so lately come into the world;—to him, unfamiliar

with babies, such a wondrous mystery. Alas! a mystery which it was his lot to behold—as all the joys of life—from the outside.

But though life's joys were forbidden him, its duties seemed to accumulate daily. There was Mr. Cardross to be kept patient by the assurance that all was well, and that presently his daughter and his grandchild would be coming home. There was Alick Cardross, now a young clerk in the office of Menteith & Ross, to be looked after, and kept from agitating his sister by any questionings; and there was a tribe of young Menteiths always needing assistance or advice—now and then something more tangible than advice. Then there were the Earl's Edinburgh friends,

who thronged round him in hearty welcome as soon as ever they heard he was again in the good old city ;—and would willingly have drawn him back again into that brilliant society which he had enjoyed so much.


He enjoyed it still—a little : and during the weeks that elapsed before Helen was able to travel, or do anything but lie still and be taken care of, he found opportunity to mingle once more among his former associates. But his heart was always in that quiet room, which he only entered once a-day : where the newly-made widow sat with her orphan child at her bosom, and waited for Time, the healer, to soothe and bind up the inevitable wounds.

At last the day arrived when the Earl, with his little *cortège* of two carriages, one his own, the other containing Helen, her baby, and Mrs. Campbell, quitted Edinburgh, and, travelling leisurely, neared the shores of Loch Beg.

They did not come by the ferry, Lord Cairnforth having given orders to drive round the head of the loch, as the easiest and most unobtrusive way of bringing Helen home. Much he wondered how she bore it—the sight of the familiar hills—exactly the same—for it was the same time of year, almost the very day, when she had left Cairnforth; but he could not inquire. At length, after much thought, during the last stage of the journey, he bade Malcolm ask Mrs. Bruce

if she would leave her baby for a little and come into the Earl's carriage — which message she obeyed at once.


These few weeks of companionship, not constant, but still sufficiently close, had brought them back very much into their old brother and sister relation; and though nothing had been distinctly said about it, Helen had accepted passively all the Earl's generosity, both for herself and her child. Once or twice, when he had noticed a slight hesitation or uneasiness in her manner, Lord Cairnforth had said, — "I promised *him*, you remember," and this had silenced her. Besides, she was too utterly worn-out and broken-down to resist any kindness. She seemed to open her heart to it — Helen's proud,



sensitive, independent heart — much as a plant, long dried up, withered, and trampled upon, opens itself to the sunshine and the dew.

But now her health, both of body and mind, had revived a little; and as she sat opposite to him, in her grave, composed widowhood, even the disguise of the black weeds could not take away a look that returned again and again — reminding the Earl of the Helen of his childhood — the bright, sweet, wholesome - natured, high-spirited Helen Cardross.

“I asked you to come to me in the carriage,” said he, after they had spoken a while about ordinary things. “Before we reach home, I think we




ought to have a little talk upon some few matters which we have never referred to as yet. Are you able for this?"

"Oh yes, but —— I can't—I can't!"
—and a sudden expression of trouble and fear darkened the widow's face. "Do not ask me any questions about the past. It is all over now—it seems like a dream—as if I had never been away from Cairnforth."

"Let it be so then, Helen, my dear," replied the Earl, tenderly. "Indeed I never meant otherwise. It is far the best."

Thus, both at the time and ever after, he laid, and compelled others to lay, the seal of silence upon those two sad years, the secrets of which were buried in Captain




Bruce's quiet grave in Greyfriars' Churchyard.

"Helen," he continued, "I am not going to ask you a single question: I am only going to tell you a few things, which you are to tell your father at the first opportunity, so as to place you in a right position towards him, and, whatever his health may be, to relieve his mind entirely both as to you and Boy."

"Boy," the little Alexander had already begun to be called. "Boy," *par excellence*, for even at that early period of his existence he gave tokens of being a most masculine character, with a resolute will of his own, and a power of howling till he got his will, which delighted

Nurse Campbell exceedingly. He was already a thorough Cardross — not in the least a Bruce : he inherited Helen's great blue eyes, large frame, and healthy temperament ; and was, in short, that repetition of the mother in the son which Dame Nature delights in, and out of which she sometimes makes the finest and noblest men that the world ever sees.

“ Boy has been wide awake these two hours, noticing everything,” said his mother, with a mother's firm conviction that this rather imaginative fact was the most interesting possible to everybody. “ He might have known the loch quite well already, by the way he kept staring at it.”



“He will know it well enough by-and-bye,” said the Earl, smiling. “You are aware, Helen, that he and you are permanently coming home.”

“To the Manse? yes! My dear father! he will keep us there during his life-time. “Afterwards we must take our chance, my boy and I.”

“Not quite that. Are you not aware — I thought, from circumstances, you must have guessed it, long ago — that Cairnforth Castle, and my whole property, will be yours, some time?”

Helen coloured up, vividly and painfully, to the very brow.

“I will tell you no untruth, Lord Cairnforth. I *was* aware of it. That is, he — I mean it was suspected that

you had meant it once. I found this out — don't ask me how — shortly after I was married. And I determined, as the only chance of avoiding it—and several other things — never to write to you again: never to take the least means of bringing myself — us — back to your memory.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ I wished you to forget us, and all connected with us; and to choose some one more worthy, more suitable, to inherit your property.”

“ But, Helen, that choice rested with myself alone,” said the Earl, smiling. “ Has not a man the right to do what he likes with his own ? ”

“ Yes; but — oh,” cried Helen, earnestly,

“do not talk of this. It caused me such misery once. Never let us speak of it again.”

“I must speak of it,” was the answer, equally earnest. “All my comfort — I will not say happiness; we have both learnt, Helen, not to count too much upon happiness in this world — but all the peace of my future life, be it short or long, depends upon my having my heart’s desire in this matter. It is my heart’s desire, and no one shall forbid it. I will carry out my intentions, whether you agree to them or not. I will speak of them no more, if you do not wish it, but I shall certainly perform them. And I think it would be far better if we could talk matters out together, and ar-

range everything, plainly and openly, before you go home to the Manse, if you prefer the Manse. Though I could have wished it was to the Castle."

"To the Castle!"

"Yes. I intended to have brought you back from Edinburgh — *all* of you," added the Earl, with emphasis, "to the Castle for life."

Helen was much affected. She made no attempt either to resist or to reply.

"But now, my dear, you shall do exactly what you will about the home you choose; exactly what makes you most content, and your father also. Only listen to me just for five minutes, without interrupt-

ing me. I never could bear to be interrupted, you know."

Helen faintly smiled, and Lord Cairnforth, in a brief, business-like way, explained how, the day after his coming of age, he had deliberately, and upon what he — and Mr. Menteith likewise — considered just grounds, constituted her, Helen Cardross, as his sole heiress. That he had never altered his will since, and therefore she now was, and always would have been, and her children after her, rightful successors to the Castle and broad acres of Cairnforth.

"The title lapses," he added; "there will be no more Earls of Cairnforth. But your boy may be the founder of a new name and family, that may live and

rule for generations along the shores of our loch: and perhaps keep even my poor name alive there for a little while."

Helen did not speak. Probably she too, with her clear common sense, saw the wisdom of the thing. For as the Earl said, he had a right to choose his own heir—and, as even the world would say, what better heir could he choose than his next of kin—Captain Bruce's child? What mother could resist such a prospect for her son? She sat, her tears flowing, but still with a great light in her blue eyes, as if she saw far away in the distance, far beyond all this sorrow and pain, the happy future of her darling—her only child.

“Of course, Helen, I could pass you over, and leave all direct to that young man of yours, who is, if I died intestate, my rightful heir. But I will not—at least, not yet. Perhaps, if I live to see him of age, I may think about making him take my name, as Bruce-Montgomerie. But meanwhile I shall educate him, send him to school and college, and at home he shall be put under Malcolm’s care, and have ponies to ride and boats to row. In short, Helen,” concluded the Earl, looking earnestly in her face with that sad, fond, and yet peaceful expression he had, “I mean your boy to do all that I could not do, and to be all that I ought to have been. You are satisfied?”

“ Yes — quite. I thank you. And I thank God.”

A minute more and the carriage stopped at the wicket-gate of the Manse garden.

There stood the minister, with his white locks bared, and his whole figure trembling with agitation, but still himself: stronger and better than he had been for many months.

“ Papa! papa!” And Helen, his own Helen, was in his arms.

“ Drive on,” said Lord Cairnforth, hurriedly, “ Malcolm, we will go straight to the Castle now.”

And so, no one heeding him — they were too happy to notice anything beyond themselves — the Earl passed on, with a

strange smile, not of this world at all, upon his quiet face; and returned to his own stately and solitary home.



Chapter the Fifth.

■

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■





GOOD Mrs. Campbell had guessed truly, that from this time forward Helen Bruce would be only a mother. Either she was one of those women in whom the maternal element predominates—who seem born to take care of other people, and rarely to be taken care of themselves—or else her cruel experience of married life had for ever blighted in her all wifely emotions—even wifely regrets. She was grave, sad, silent, for many months during her early term of widowhood, but she made no pre-

tence of extravagant sorrow, and, except under the rarest and most necessary circumstances, she never even named her husband. Nothing did she betray about him—or her personal relations with him—even to her nearest and dearest friends. He had passed away, leaving no more enduring memory than the tombstone which Lord Cairnforth had erected in Greyfriars' Churchyard.

—Except his child; of whom it was the mother's undisguised delight that, outwardly and inwardly, the little fellow appeared to be wholly a Cardross. With his relatives on the father's side—after the one formal letter which she had requested should be written to Colonel Bruce, announcing Captain Bruce's death—Helen

evidently wished to keep up no acquaintance whatever. Nay, more than wished; she was determined it should be so — with that quiet, resolute determination which was sometimes seen in every feature of her strong Scotch face, once so girlish and sweet. Nor was her face unsweet now; but it bore tokens of what she had gone through: of a battle from which no woman ever comes out unwounded or unscarred.

But, as before said, she was a mother, and wholly a mother; which blessed fact healed the young widow's heart better, and sooner, than anything else could have done. Besides, in her case there was no suspense, no conflict of duties — all her duties were done. Had they lasted after her

child's birth the struggle might have been too hard ; for mothers have responsibilities as well as wives, and when these conflict, as they do sometimes, God help her who has to choose between them ! But Helen was saved this misfortune. Providence had taken her destiny out of her own hands, and here she was, free as Helen Cardross of old—in exactly the same position, and going through the same simple round of daily cares and daily avocations which she had done as the minister's active and helpful daughter.


For as nothing else but the minister's daughter would she, for the present, be recognised at Cairnforth. Lord Cairnforth's intentions, towards herself or her son

she insisted on keeping wholly secret — except, of course, as regarded that dear and good father.

“I may die,” she said to the Earl, — “die before yourself; and if my boy grows up you may not love him, or he may not deserve your love, in which case you must choose another heir. No, you shall be bound in no way externally; let all go on as heretofore. I will have it so.”

And of all Lord Cairnforth’s generosity she would accept nothing for herself — except a small annual sum, which, with her widow’s pension from the East India Company, sufficed to make her independent of her father: but she did not refuse kindness to her boy.

Never was there such a boy. “Boy”



he was called from the first, never "baby;" there was nothing of the baby about him. Before he was a year old he ruled his mother, grandfather, and Uncle Duncan with a rod of iron. Nay, the whole village were his slaves. "Miss Helen's bairn" was a little king everywhere. It might have gone rather hard for the poor wee fellow, thus, allegorically,

"Wearing on his baby brow the round
And top of sovereignty:"

that dangerous sovereignty for any child — any human being — to wield, had there not been at least one person who was able to assume authority over him.

This was, strange to say—and yet not strange—the Earl of Cairnforth.

From his earliest babyhood Boy had been accustomed to the sight of the motionless figure in the moving chair—who never touched him, but always spoke so kindly and looked round so smilingly; whom, he could perceive—for children are quicker to notice things than we sometimes think—his mother and grandfather invariably welcomed with such exceeding pleasure, and treated with never-failing respect and tenderness. And, as soon as he could crawl, the foot-board of the mysterious wheeled chair became to the little man a perfect treasure-house of delight. Hidden there he found toys,

picture-books, "sweeties" — gifts such as he got nowhere else, and for which, before appropriating them, he was carefully taught to express thanks in his own infantile way, and made to understand fully from whom they came.

"It's bribery, and against my principles," the Earl would sometimes say, half sadly. "But if I did not give him things, how else could Boy learn to love me?"

Helen never answered this — no more than she used to answer many similar speeches in the Earl's childhood. She knew time would prove them all to be wrong.

What sort of idea the child really had of this wonderful donor — the source

of most of his pleasures—who yet was so different externally from everybody else; who never moved from the wheel-chair; who neither caressed him nor played with him, and whom he was not allowed to play with, but only lifted up sometimes to kiss softly the kind face which always smiled down upon him with a sort of “superior love;”—what the child’s childish notion of his friend was, no one could, of course, discover. But it must have been a mingling of awe and affectionateness; for he would often—even before he could walk—crawl up to the little chair, steady himself by it, and then look up into Lord Cairnforth’s face with those mysterious, baby eyes—full of questioning, but yet without the slightest

fear. And once, when his mother was teaching him his first hymn,—

“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,”

Boy startled her by the sudden remark — one of the divine profanities that are often falling from the innocent lips of little children,—

“I know Jesus. He is the Earl.”

And then Helen tried, in some simple way, to make the child understand about Lord Cairnforth — and how he had been all his life so heavily afflicted ; but Boy could not comprehend it as affliction at all. There seemed to him something not inferior, but superior to all other people, in that motion-

less figure with its calm sweet face—who was never troubled, never displeased—whom everybody delighted to obey, and at whose feet lay treasures untold.

“I think Boy likes me,” Lord Cairnforth would say, when he met the up-turned, beaming face—as the child, in an ecstasy of expectation, ran to meet him. “His love may last as long as the playthings do.”


But the Earl was mistaken—as Helen knew. His love-victory had been in something deeper than toys and “goodies.” Even when their charm began to cease Boy still crept up to the little chair, and looked from the empty footboard

up to the loving face — which no one, man, woman, or child, ever regarded without something far higher than pity.

And, by degrees, Boy, or “Carr” — which, as being the diminutive for his second Christian name, Cardross, he was often called now — found a new attraction in his friend. He would listen with wide-open eyes, and attention that never flagged, to the interminable “’tories” which the Earl told him — out of the same brilliant imagination which had once used to delight his uncles in the boat. And so, little by little, the child and the man grew to be “a pair of friends” — familiar and fond — but with a certain tender

reverence always between them, which had the most salutary effect on the younger.

Whenever he was sick or sorry, or naughty — and Master “Boy” could be exceedingly naughty sometimes — the voice which had most influence over him, the influence to which he always succumbed, came from the little wheeled chair. No anger did he ever find there; — no dark looks or sharp tones — but he found steady, unbending authority; the firm will which never passed over a single fault, or yielded to a single whim. In his wildest passions of grief or wrath, it was only necessary to say to the child, “If the Earl could see you!” to make him pause — and many




and many a time, whenever motherly authority—which in this case was weakened both by occasional over-indulgence and by an almost morbid terror of the results of the same—failed to conquer the child, Helen used, as a last resource, to bring him in her arms, set him down beside Lord Cairnforth, and leave him there. She never came back, but she found Boy “good.”

“He makes me good, too, I think,” the Earl would say now and then, “for he makes me happy.”

It was true. Lord Cairnforth never looked otherwise than happy when he had beside him that little blossom of hope of the new generation—Helen’s child.

As years went by, though he still lived alone at the Castle, it was by no means the secluded life of his youth and early manhood. He gradually gathered about him neighbours and friends. He filled his house occasionally with guests, of his own rank and of all ranks: people notable and worthy to be known. He became a "patron," as they called it in those days, of art and literature, and assembled around him all who, for his pleasure and their own benefit, chose to enjoy his hospitality.

In a quiet way, for he disliked public show—he was likewise what was termed a "philanthropist:" but always on the system which he had learned in his boyhood from Helen and Mr. Cardross,



that "charity begins at home:" with the father who guides well his own household; the minister whose footstep is welcomed at every door in his own parish; the proprietor whose just, wise, and merciful rule makes him sovereign absolute in his own estate. This last especially was the character given along all the country-side to the Earl of Cairnforth.

His was not a sad existence—far from it. None who knew him, and certainly none who ever stayed long with him in his own home, went away with that impression. He enjoyed what he called "a sunshiny life"—having sunshiny faces about him: people who knew how to accept the sweet and endure the bitter;

—to see the heavenly side even of sorrow:
—to do good to all, and receive good from
all—avoiding all envies, jealousies, angers,
and strifes, and following out literally the
Apostolic command, “As much as in you
lies, live peaceably with all men.”

And so the Earl was, in the best
sense of the word, popular. Everybody
liked him, and he liked everybody. But
deep in his heart, ay, deeper than any of
these his friends and acquaintance ever
dreamed—steady and strengthening it,
keeping it warm for all human uses, yet
calm with the quiet sadness of an eternal
want—lay all those emotions which are not
likings but loves, not sympathies but passions,
but which with him were to be in this world
for ever dormant and unfulfilled.

Never, let the Castle be ever so full of visitors, or let his daily cares, his outward interests, and his innumerable private charities, be ever so great, — did he omit driving over twice or thrice a-week to spend an hour or two at the Manse — in winter, by the study fire; in summer, under the shade of the green elm-trees — the same trees where he had passed that first sunny Sunday when he came, a poor, lonely, crippled, orphan child, into the midst of the large, merry family — all scattered now.

The Minister, Helen, and Boy were the sole inmates left at the Manse: and of these three the latter certainly was the most important. Hide

•

it as she would, the principal object of the mother's life was her only child. Many a time, as Lord Cairnforth sat talking with her, after his old fashion, of all his interests, schemes, labours, and hopes—hopes solely for others, and labours, the end of which he knew he would never see—he would smile to himself, noticing how Helen's eye wandered all the while—wandered to where that rosy young scapegrace rode his tiny pony—the Earl's gift—up and down the gravel walks—or played at romps with Malcolm—or dug holes in the flower-beds—or got into all and sundry of the countless disgraces which were for ever befalling Boy. Yet which, so loveable was the little

fellow, were as continually forgiven, and, behind his back, even exalted into something very like merits.

But once, and it was an incident which, whether or not Mrs. Bruce forgot it herself, her friend never did, since it furnished a key to much of the past, and a serious out-look for the future, — Boy committed an error, which threw his mother into an agony of agitation, such as she had not betrayed since she came back, a widow, to Cairnforth.

Her little son told a lie! It was a very small lie — such as dozens of children tell — are punished and pardoned — but a lie it was. It happened one August morning, when the raspberries were ripe — those huge red - and - white

raspberries for which the Manse was famous. He was desired not to touch them—"not to lay a finger on them," insisted the mother. And he promised. But, alas! the promises of four years old are not absolutely reliable; and so that which happened once in a more ancient garden happened in the garden of the Manse. Boy plucked and ate. He came back to his mother with his white pinafore all marked, and his red mouth redder still, with condemnatory stains. Yet, when asked "if he had touched the raspberries," he opened that wicked mouth and said, unblushingly, "No!"

Of course, it was an untruth — self-evident: in its very simplicity almost

amusing; but the Earl was not prepared for the effect it seemed to have upon Helen. She started back, her lips actually blanched, and her eyes glowing.

“My son has told a lie!” she cried, and kept repeating it over and over again. “My son has looked me in the face and told me a lie!—his first lie!”

“Hush, Helen!” for her manner seemed actually to frighten the child.

“No, I cannot pass it over! I dare not! He must be punished. Come!”

She seized Boy by the hand, looking another way, and was moving off with him, as if she hardly knew what she was doing.

“Helen!” called the Earl, almost

reproachfully. For, in his opinion, out of all comparison with the offence seemed the bitterness with which the mother felt it, and was about to punish it. "Tell me, first, what are you going to do with the child?"

"I hardly know — I must think — must pray. What if my son, my only son, should inherit — I mean, if he should grow up to be a liar?"

That word "inherit" betrayed her. No wonder now at the mother's agony of fear — she who was mother to Captain Bruce's son. Lord Cairnforth guessed it all.

"I understand," said he. "But ——"

"No," Helen interrupted, "you need understand nothing, for I have told you

nothing. Only, I must kill the sin — the fatal sin — at the very root. I *must* punish him. Come, child!”

She was trembling all over with agitation.

“Come back, Helen,” said the Earl; and something in the tone made her obey at once; as occasionally during her life, Helen had been glad to obey him, and creep under the shelter of a stronger will and clearer judgment than her own. “You are altogether mistaken, my dear friend. Your boy is only a child, and errs as such; and you treat him as if he had sinned like a grown-up man. Be reasonable. We will both take care of him. No fear that he will turn out a liar!”

Helen hesitated; but still her looks were so angry and stern, all the mother

vanished out of them, that the boy, instead of clinging to her, ran away crying, and hid himself behind Lord Cairnforth's chair.

"Leave him to me, Helen. Cannot you trust me — *me* — with your son?"

Mrs. Bruce paused.

"Now," said the Earl, wheeling himself round a little, so that he came face to face with the sobbing child, "lift up your head, Boy, and speak the truth like a man to me and to your mother — see! she is listening. Did you touch those raspberries?"

"No!"

"Cardross!" calling him by his rarely spoken name, not his pet-name, and fixing upon him eyes, not angry, but clear and searching, that compelled the truth

even from a child, "think again. You must tell us!"

"No, me didn't touch them," answered Boy, dropping his head in conscious shame. "Not with me fingers. Me just opened me mouth and they popped in."

Lord Cairnforth could hardly help smiling at the poor little sinner—the infant Jesuit attaining his object by such an ingenious device; but the mother did not smile, and her look was harder than ever.

"You hear! If not a lie—it was a prevarication. He who lies is a scoundrel, but he who prevaricates is a scoundrel and coward too. Sooner than Boy should grow up like—like that, I would rather die. No, I would rather

see him die; for I might come in time to hate my own son."

By those fierce words, and by the gleaming eyes, which made a sudden and total change in the subdued manner, and the plain, almost elderly face under the widow's cap that Helen always wore — Lord Cairnforth guessed, more than he had ever guessed before, of what the sufferings of her married life had been.

"My friend," he said, and there was infinite pity as well as tenderness in his voice, "believe me, you are wrong. You are foreboding what, please God, will never happen. God does not deal with us in that manner. He bids us do His will, each of us individually, without reference to the doings or misdoings of any other

person. And if we obey Him, I believe He takes care we shall not suffer — at least, not for ever, even in this world. Do not be afraid. Boy,” calling the little fellow, who was now sobbing in bitterest contrition behind the wheeled chair, “come and kiss your mother. Promise her that you will never again vex her by telling a lie.”

“No, no, no. Me’ll not vex mamma. Good mamma! pretty mamma! Boy so sorry!”

And he clung closely and passionately to his mother, kissing her averted face twenty times over.


“You see, Helen, you need not fear,” said the Earl.

Helen burst into tears.

After that day it came to be a

general rule that, when she could not manage him herself, which not unfrequently happened,—for the very similarity in temperament and disposition between the mother and son made their conflicts, even at this early age, longer and harder — Helen brought Boy up to the Castle and left him, sometimes for hours together, in the library with Lord Cairnforth. He always came home to the Manse quiet and “good.”

And so out of babyhood into boyhood, and thence into youth, grew the Earl’s adopted son. For practically it became that relationship, though no distinct explanation was ever given, or any absolute information vouchsafed, for indeed there was none who had a right




to inquire: still the neighbourhood and the public at large took it for granted that such were Lord Cairnforth's intentions towards his little cousin.

As for the boy's mother, she led a life very retired, more retired than even Helen Cardross, doing all her duties as the minister's daughter, but seldom appearing in society. And society speculated little about her. Sometimes, when the Castle was full of guests, Mrs. Bruce appeared among them, still in her widow's weeds, to be received by Lord Cairnforth with marked attention and respect — always called "my cousin," and, whoever was present, invariably requested to take the head of his table; but, except at these occasional seasons, and at birth-days, new-

years, and so on, Helen was seldom seen out of the Manse, and was very little known to the Earl's ordinary acquaintance.

But everybody in the whole peninsula knew the minister's grandson, young Master Bruce. The boy was tall of his age—not exactly handsome, being too like his mother for that; nevertheless the robustness of form which in her was too large for comeliness, became in him only manly size and strength. He was athletic, graceful, and active; he learned to ride almost as soon as he could walk; and under Malcolm's charge was early initiated in all the mysteries of moor and loch. By fourteen years of age Cardross Bruce was the best shot, the best fisher,




the best hand at an oar, of all the young lads in the neighbourhood.

Then, too, though allowed to run rather wild, he was unmistakeably a gentleman. Though he mixed freely with everybody in the parish, he was neither haughty nor over-familiar with any one. He had something of the minister's manner with inferiors—frank, gentle, and free—winning both trust and love, and yet it was impossible to take liberties with him. And some of the elder people in the clachan declared the lad had at times just “the merry glint o’ the minister’s e’en” when Mr. Cardross first came to the parish as a young man, with his young wife.

He was an old man now—“wearin’ awa,” but slowly and peacefully; preaching

still, though less regularly, for, to his great delight, his son Duncan, having come out creditably at College, had been appointed his assistant and successor. Uncle Duncan — only twelve years his nephew's senior — was also appointed by Lord Cairnforth tutor to "Boy" Bruce. The two were very good friends, and not unlike one another. "Ay, he's just a Cardross," was the universal remark concerning young Bruce. No one ever hinted that the lad was like his father.

He was not. Nature seemed mercifully to have forgotten to perpetuate that type of character, which had given Mr. Menteith formerly, and others since, such a justifiable dread of the Bruce family, and such a righteous determination to escape them. Not



to injure them — only to escape them. Lord Cairnforth still paid the annuity, but on condition that no one of his father's kindred should ever interfere, in the smallest degree, with Helen's child.

This done, both he and she trusted to the strong safeguards of habit and education, and all other influences which so strongly modify character — to make the boy all that they desired him to be, and to counteract those tendencies which, as Lord Cairnforth plainly perceived, were Helen's daily dread. It was a struggle — mysterious as that which visible human free-will is for ever opposing (apparently) to invisible fate, the end of which it is impossible to see, and yet we struggle on.


Thus labouring together with one hope, one aim, and one affection—all centred in this boy—Lord Cairnforth and Mrs. Bruce passed many a placid year. And when the mother's courage failed her—when her heart shrank in apprehension from real terrors or from chimeras of her own creating—her friend taught her to fold patiently her trembling hands, and say, as she herself and the minister had first taught him in his forlorn boyhood—the one only prayer which calms fear and comforts sorrow—the lesson of the Earl's whole life—"Thy will be done!"



Chapter the Sixth.





 ELEN, that boy of yours ought to be sent to College."

"Oh, no! Surely you do not think it necessary?" said Helen, visibly shrinking.

She and Lord Cairnforth were sitting together in the Castle library. Young Cardross had been sitting beside them, holding a long argument with his mother, as he often did; for he was of a decidedly argumentative turn of mind: until, getting the worst of the battle, and being rather "put down"


— a position rarely agreeable to the self-esteem of eighteen — he had flushed up angrily, made no reply, but opened one of the low windows and leaped out on the Terrace. There, pacing to and fro along the Countess's garden, they saw the boy — or rather, young man, for he looked like one now. He moved with a rapid step; the wind tossing his fair curls — Helen's curls over again — and cooling his hot cheeks, as he tried to recover his temper, which he did not often lose, especially in the Earl's presence.

Experience had not effaced the first mysterious impression made on the little child's mind by the wheeled chair and its occupant. If there was one

person in the world who had power to guide and control this high-spirited lad, it was Lord Cairnforth. And as the latter moved his chair a little round, so that he could more easily look out into the garden and see the graceful figure sauntering among the flower-beds, it was evident by his expression that the Earl loved Helen's boy very dearly.

"He is a fine fellow, and a good fellow, as ever was born — that young man of yours. Still, as I have told you many a time, he would be all the better if he were sent to College."

"For his education? I thought Duncan was fully competent to complete that."



“Not altogether. But, for many reasons, I think it would be advisable for him to go from home for a while.”

“Why? Because his mother spoils him?”

The Earl smiled, and gave no direct answer. In truth, the harm Helen did her boy was not so much in her “spoiling”—love rarely injures—as in the counteracting weight which she sometimes threw on the other side:—in the sudden tight rein which she drew upon his little follies and faults—the painful clashing of two equally strong wills, which sometimes happened between the mother and son.

This was almost inevitable, with Helen’s

peculiar character. As she sat there, the sun shining on her fair face—still fair;—a clear, healthy red-and-white, though she was over forty—you might trace some harsh lines in it, and see clearly that, save for her exceeding unselfishness and lovingness of disposition, Mrs. Bruce might, in middle age, have grown into what is termed a “hard” woman: capable of passionate affection, but of equally passionate severity: and prone to exercise both alike upon the beings most precious to her on earth.

“I fear it is not a pleasant doctrine to preach to mothers,” said Lord Cairnforth; “but, Helen, all boys ought to leave home some time. How else are they to know the world?”

"I do not wish my boy to know the world."

"But he must. He ought. Remember, his life is likely to be a very different one from either yours or mine."

"Do not let us think of that," said Helen, uneasily.

"My friend, I have been thinking of it ever since he was born — or at least, ever since he came to Cairnforth. That day seems almost like yesterday, and yet — We are growing quite middle-aged folk, Helen, my dear."

Helen sighed. These peaceful, uneventful years — how fast they had slipped by! She began to count them — after the only fashion by which she cared to count anything now. "Yes: Cardross will

be a man — actually and legally a man — in little more than two years.”

“That is just what I was considering. By that time we must come to some decision on a subject which you will never let me speak of; but, by-and-bye, Helen, you must. Do you suppose that your son guesses, or that anybody has ever told him, what his future position is to be?”

“I think not. There was nobody to tell him — for nobody knew. No,” continued Helen, speaking strongly and decidedly, “I am determined on one point — nothing shall bind you as regards my son or me — nothing, except your own free will. To talk of me as your successor is idle — I am older

than you are : and you must not be compromised as regards my son. He is a good boy now — but temptation is strong, and,” with an irrepressible shudder, “appearances are deceitful sometimes. Wait, as I have always said — wait till you see what sort of man Cardross turns out to be.”

Lord Cairnforth made no reply — and once more the two friends sat watching the unconscious youth, who had been for so many years the one object of both their lives.

“Ignorance is not innocence,” said the Earl at length, after a long fit of musing. “If you bind a creature morally hand and foot, how can it ever learn to walk ? It would, as soon

as you loosed the bonds, find itself, not free, but paralysed — as helpless a creature as myself.”

Helen turned away from watching her boy, and laid her hand tenderly, in her customary caress, on the feeble hand, which yet had been the means of accomplishing so much.

“You should not speak so,” she said. “Scarcely ever is there a more useful life than yours.”

“More useful certainly than any one once expected — except you, Helen. I have tried to make you not ashamed of me these thirty years.”

“Is it so many? Thirty years since the day you first came to the Manse?”

“ Yes — you know I was forty last birthday. Who would have thought my life would have lasted so long ? But it cannot last for ever ; and before I am ‘ away,’ as your dear old father would say, I should like to leave you quite settled and happy about that boy.”

“ Who says I am not happy ? ” answered Mrs. Bruce, rather sharply.

“ Nobody : — but I see it myself sometimes : when you get that restless, anxious look — there it is now ! Helen, I must have it away. I think it would trouble me in my grave if I left you unhappy,” added the Earl, regarding her with that expression of yearning tenderness which she had

been so used to all her days, that she rarely noticed it,—until the days came when she saw it no more.

“I am not unhappy,” she said, earnestly. “Why should I be? My dear father keeps well still—he enjoys a green old age. And is not my son growing up everything that a mother’s heart could desire?”

“I do believe it! Cardross is a good boy—a very good boy. But the metal has never been tested—as the soundest metal always requires to be—and until this is done, you will never rest. I had rather it were done during my lifetime than afterwards. Helen, I particularly wish the boy to go to College.”

The Earl spoke so decidedly that Mrs.

Bruce replied with only the brief question
“Where?”

“To Edinburgh; because there he would not be left quite alone. His uncle Alick would keep an eye upon him, and he could be boarded with Mrs. Menteith, whose income would be none the worse for the addition I would make to it. For, of course, Helen, if he goes, it must be—not exactly as my declared heir, since you dislike that so much—but as my cousin and nearest of kin, which he is undeniably.”

Helen acquiesced in silence.

“I have a right to him, you see,” said Lord Cairnforth, smiling—“and really I am rather proud of my young fellow. He may not be very clever—the minister says he is not—but he is what I call a

man. Like his mother, who never was clever, but yet was every inch a woman—the best woman, in all relations of life, that I ever knew.”

Helen smiled too—a little sadly, perhaps—but soon her mind recurred from all other things to her one prominent thought.

“And what would you do with the boy himself? He knows nothing of money—has never had a pound-note in his pocket all his life.”

“Then it is high time he should have—and a good many of them. I shall pay Mrs. Menteith well for his board, but I shall make him a sufficient allowance besides. He must learn how to manage his money—and himself. He must

stand on his own feet, without any one to support him. It is the only way to make a boy into a man—a man that is worth anything. Do you not see that yourself?”

“I see, Lord Cairnforth, that you think it would be best for my boy to be separated from his mother.”

She spoke in a hurt tone, and yet with a painful consciousness that what she said was not far off the truth. More especially as the Earl did not absolutely deny the accusation.

“I think, my dear Helen, that it would be better if he were separated from us all, for a time. We are such quiet, old-fashioned folks at Cairnforth—he may come to weary of us, you

know. But my strongest motive is exactly what I stated: that he should be left to himself, to feel his own strength, and the strength of those principles which we have tried to give him—that any special character he possesses may have free space to develop itself. Up to a certain point we can take care of our children—beyond, we cannot, nay, we ought not; they must take care of themselves. I believe—do not be angry, Helen—but I believe there comes a time in every boy's life when the wisest thing even his mother can do for him is—to leave him alone.”

“And not watch over him—not guide him?”

“Yes, but not so as to vex him by the watching and the guiding. However,

we will talk of this another day. Here the lad comes."

And the Earl's eyes brightened, almost as much as Helen's did, when Cardross leaped in at the window, all his good-humour restored, kissed his mother in his rough, fond way, of which he was not in the least ashamed as yet, and sat down by the wheeled chair, with that tender respectfulness and involuntary softening of manner and tone which he never failed to show towards Lord Cairnforth, and had never shown so much to any other human being.

Ay, the Earl had his compensations. We all have, if we know it.

Gradually, in many a long, quiet talk, during which she listened to his rea-

sonings as probably she would have listened to no other man's, he contrived to reconcile Mrs. Bruce to the idea of parting with her boy—their first separation, even for a day, since Cardross was born. It was neither for very long nor very far, since civilization had now brought Edinburgh to within a few hours' journey of Cairnforth; but it was very sore, nevertheless, to both mother and son.

Helen took her boy and confided him to Mrs. Menteith herself; but she could not be absent for more than one day, for just about this time her father's "green old age" began to fail a little, and he grew extremely dependent upon her, which, perhaps, was the best thing that

could have happened to her at this crisis. She had to assume that tenderest, happiest duty of being "nursing mother" to the second childhood of one who throughout her own childhood, youth, and middle age, had been to her everything that was honoured, and deserving honour — loving, and worthy of love — in a parent.

Not that Mr. Cardross had sank into any helpless state of mind or body; the dread of paralysis had proved a false alarm; and Helen's coming home — to remain there for ever — together with the thoroughly peaceful life which he had since lived, for so many years, had kept up the old man's vitality to a surprising extent. His life was now only fading

away by slow and insensible degrees — like the light out of the sunset clouds, or the colours from the mountains — silent warnings of the night coming, “in which no man can work.”

The minister had worked all his days — his Master’s work; none the less worthy that it was done in no public manner, and had met with no public reward. Beyond his own Presbytery the name of the Reverend Alexander Cardross was scarcely known. He was not a popular preacher; he had never published a book, or even a sermon, and he had taken no part in the theological controversies of the time. He was content to let other men fight about Christianity; he only lived it, spending himself for nought,

some might think, in his own country parish, and among his poor country people — the pastor and father of them all.

He had never striven . after this world's good things, and they never came to him, in any great measure ; but better things did. He always had enough — and a little to spare for those who had less. In his old age this righteous man was not “forsaken,” and his seed never “begged their bread.” His youngest, Duncan, was always beside him, and yearly his four other sons came . to visit him from the various places where they had settled themselves ; to labour, and prosper, and transmit honourably to another generation the honest name of Cardross.

For the minister's "ae dochter," she was, as she had been always, his right hand; watching him, tending him, helping and guarding him, expending her whole life for him, so as to make him feel as lightly as possibly the gradual decay of his own. Above all, loving him with a love that made labour easy and trouble light — the passionately devoted love which we often see sons show to mothers, and daughters to fathers; when they have never had the parental ideal broken, nor been left to wander through life in a desolation which is only second to that of being "without God in the world."

"I think he has a happy old age —

the dear old father!" said Helen one day when she and Lord Cairnforth sat talking, while the minister was as usual absorbed in the library — the great Cairnforth library, now becoming notable all over Scotland, of which Mr. Cardross had had the sole arrangement; and every book therein the Earl declared he loved as dearly as he did his children.

"Yes, he is certainly happy. And he has had a happy life, too,—more so than most people."

"He deserved it. All these seventy-five years he has kept truth on his lips, and honour and honesty in his heart. He has told no man a lie: has overreached and deceived no man: and though he was poor — poor always, when he

married my mother exceedingly poor, he has literally, from that day to this, 'owed no man anything, but to love one another.' Oh!" cried Helen, looking after the old man in almost a passion of tenderness, "Oh, that my son may grow up like his grandfather! Like nobody else — only his grandfather."

"I think he will," answered Lord Cairnforth.

And in truth the accounts they had of young Cardross were, for some time, extremely satisfactory. He had accommodated himself to his new life — had taken kindly to his College work: gave no trouble to Mrs. Men-teith, and still less to his uncle; the latter a highly respectable but not

very interesting gentleman — a partner in the firm of Menteith and Ross, and lately married to the youngest Miss Menteith.

Still, by his letters, the nephew did not seem overwhelmingly fond of him : complaining sometimes that uncle Alick interfered with him a little too much : investigated his expenses : made him balance his accounts : and insisted that these should be kept within the limits suitable for Mrs. Bruce's son and Mr. Cardross's grandson : who would have to work his way in the world as his uncles had done before him.

“ You see, Helen,” said the Earl, “ all concealment brings its difficulties. It would be much easier for the boy if

he were told his position and his future career at once; nay, if he had known it from the first."

But Helen would not hear of this. She was obstinate, all but fierce, on the subject. No argument would convince her that it was not safer for her son, who had been brought up in such Arcadian simplicity, to continue believing himself what he appeared to be, than to be dazzled by the knowledge that he was the chosen heir of the Earl of Cairnforth.

So, somewhat against his judgment, the Earl yielded.

All winter and spring things went on peacefully in the little peninsula, which was now being grasped tightly by the strong arm of encroaching civilization.

Acre after acre of moorland disappeared, and became houses, gardens, greenhouses the feu-rents of which made the estate of Cairnforth more valuable every year.

“That young man of yours will have enough on his hands one day,” the Earl said to Helen. “He lives an easy life now, and little thinks what hard work he is coming to. As Mr. Menteith once told me, the owner of Cairnforth has no sinecure, nor will have for the next quarter of a century.”

“You expect a busy life, then?”

“Yes; and I must have that boy to help me—till he comes to his own. But, Helen, after that time, you must not let him be idle. The richest man should work, if he can. I wonder what line

of work Cardross will take; whether he will attempt politics — his letters are very political just now, do you notice?"

"Very. And there is not half enough about himself."

"He might get into Parliament," continued the Earl, "and perhaps some day win a peerage in his own right. Eh, Helen? Would you like to be mother to a Viscount? Viscount Cairnforth?"

"No," said Helen, tenderly, "there shall never be another Lord Cairnforth."


Thus sat these two, planning by the hour together the future of the boy who was their one delight. It amused them through all the winter and spring: till Cairnforth woods grew green again, and Loch Beg recovered its smile

of sunshiny peace, and the hills at the head of it took their summer colours, lovely and calm. Even as, year after year, these friends had watched them — throughout their two lives, of which both were now keenly beginning to feel, the greater part lay not before them but behind. But in thinking of this boy they felt young again: as if he brought to one the hope, to the other the faint reflection, of happiness that in the great mystery of Providence to each had been personally denied.

And yet they were not unhappy. Helen was not. No one could look into her face — strongly marked, but rosy-complexioned, healthy, and comely, the sort

of large comeliness which belongs to her peculiar type of Scotch women, especially in their middle age — without seeing that life was to her not only duty but enjoyment. Ay, in spite of the widow's cap, which marked her out as one who permanently belonged and meant to belong only to her son.

And the Earl, though he was getting to look old — older than Helen did — for his black curls were turning grey, and the worn and withered features contrasting with the small, childish figure, gave him a weird sort of aspect that struck almost painfully at first upon strangers, — still Lord Cairnforth preserved the exceeding sweetness and peacefulness of expression which had made his face



so beautiful as a boy, and so winning as a young man.

“He’ll ne’er be an auld man,” sometimes said the folk about Cairnforth, shaking their heads as they looked after him, and speculating for how many years the feeble body would hold out. Also, perhaps—for self-interest is bound up in the heart of every human being—feeling a little anxiety as to who should come after him, to be lord and ruler over them; perhaps to be less loved, less honoured—more so none could possibly be.

It was comfort to those who loved him then, and far more comfort afterwards, to believe—nay, to know for certain—that many a man, absorbed in

the restless struggle of this busy world,
prosperous citizen, husband and father,
had, on the whole, led a far less happy
life than the Earl of Cairnforth.





Chapter the Seventh.

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NE mild, sunny autumn day, when Cardross, having ended his first session at College, had spent apparently with extreme enjoyment his first vacation at home, and had just gone back again to Edinburgh to commence his second "year,"—the Earl of Cairnforth drove down to the Manse; as he now did almost daily, for the minister was growing too feeble to come to the Castle very often.

His old pupil found him sitting in the garden, sunning himself in a shel-

tered nook, backed by a goodly show of china roses and fuchsias, and companioned by two or three volumes of Greek plays, in which, however, he did not read much. He looked up with pleasure at the sound of the wheeled chair along the gravel walk.

"I'm glad you are come," said he. "I'm sorely needing somebody, for I have scarcely seen Helen all the morning. There she is! My lassie, where have you been these three hours?"

Helen put off his question in some gentle manner, and took her place beside her charge—or rather between her two charges—each helpless in his way, though the one most helpless once was least so now.

“Helen, something is wrong with you this morning?” said the Earl, when, Mr. Cardross having gone away for his little daily walk up and down between the garden and the kirkyard, they two sat by themselves for a while.

Mrs. Bruce made no answer.

“Nothing can be amiss with your boy, for I had a letter from him only yesterday.”

“I had one this morning.”

“And what does he say to you? To me little enough, merely complaining how dull he finds Edinburgh now, and wishing he were back again among us all.”

“I do not wonder,” said Helen, in a hard tone, and with that hard expression

which sometimes came over her face : the Earl knew it well.

“Helen, I am certain something is very wrong with you. Why do you not tell it out to me?”

“Hush ! here comes my father !”

And she hurried to him, gave him her arm, and helped his feeble steps back into the house, where for some time they three remained talking together : about the little chit-chat of the parish, and the news of the family, in its various ramifications, now extending year by year. Above all, the minister liked to hear and to talk about his eldest and favourite grandchild — his name-child, too — Alexander Cardross Bruce.

But on this subject, usually the never-

ceasing topic at the Manse, Helen was for once profoundly silent. Even when her father had dropped asleep, as in his feebleness of age he frequently did in the very midst of conversation, she sat restlessly fingering her wedding-ring, and another, which she wore as a sort of guard to it, the only jewel she possessed. It was a very large diamond, set in a plain hoop of gold. The Earl had given it to her a few months after she came back to Cairnforth: when her persistent refusal of all his offered kindnesses had almost produced a breach between them — at least the nearest approach to a quarrel they had ever known. She, seeing how deeply she had wounded him, had accepted this ring as a pledge of

amity, and had worn it ever since — by his earnest request — until it had become as familiar to her finger as the one beside it. But now she kept looking at it, and taking it off and on, with a troubled air.

“I am going to ask you a strange question, Lord Cairnforth: a rude one, if you and I were not such old friends that we do not mind anything we say to one another.”

“Say on.”

“Is this ring of mine very valuable?”

“Rather so.”

“Worth how much?”

“You certainly are rude, Helen,” replied the Earl, with a smile. “Well,

if you particularly wish to know, I believe it is worth two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred pounds!"

"Was that so alarming? How many times must I suggest that a man may do what he likes with his own? It was mine,—that is, my mother's, and I gave it to you. I hope you are worth to me at least two hundred pounds."

But no cheerfulness removed the settled cloud from Mrs. Bruce's face.

"Now—answer me—you know, Helen, you always answer me candidly and truly, what makes you put that question about the ring?"

"Because I wished to sell it."

"Sell it! why?"

"I want money, in fact I must have

money,—a good large sum,” said Helen, in exceeding agitation. “And as I will neither beg, borrow, nor steal, I must sell something to procure that sum, and this diamond is the only thing I have to sell. Now you comprehend?”

“I think I do,” was the grave answer.

“My poor Helen!”

She might have held out, but the tenderness of his tone overcame her. She turned her head away.


“Oh, it’s bitter, bitter! After all these years!”

“What is bitter? But you need not tell me. I think I can guess. You did not show me your boy’s letter of this morning.”

“There it is!”


And the poor mother, with her tears fast flowing—they had been restrained so long that now they burst out like a tide—gave way to that heart-break which many a mother has had to endure; the discovery that her son was not the perfect being she had thought him, that he was no better than other women's sons, and equally liable to fall away. Poor Cardross had been doing all sorts of wrong and foolish things, which he had kept to himself as long as he could, as long as he dared, and then had come, in an agony of penitence, and poured out the whole story of his errors and his miseries into his mother's bosom.

They were, happily, only errors, not



sins. Extravagancies in dress: amusements and dissipations, resulting in serious expenses; but the young fellow had done nothing absolutely wicked. In the strongest manner, and with the most convincing evidence to back it, he protested this; and promised to amend his ways, to "turn over a new leaf," if only his mother would forgive him, and find means to pay the heap of bills which he enclosed, and which amounted to much more than would be covered by his allowance from the Earl.

"Poor lad!" said Lord Cairnforth, as he read the letter twice over, and then carefully examined the list of debts it enclosed. "A common story."



"I know that," cried Helen, passionately. "But, oh! that it should have happened to *my* son!"

And she bowed her face upon her hands, and swayed herself to and fro in the bitterest grief and humiliation.

The Earl regarded her a little while, and then said, gently,—

"My friend, are you not making for yourself a heavy burthen out of a very light matter?"

"A light matter? But you do not see—you cannot understand."

"I think I can."

"It is not so much the thing itself—the fact of my son's being so mean, so dishonest, as to run into debt, when he knows I hate it—that I have cause

to hate it: and to shrink from it as I would from — But this is idle talking. I see you smile. You do not know all the — the dreadful past.”

“My dear, I do know — everything you could tell me — and more.”

“Then cannot you see what I dread? the first false step — the fatal beginning, of which no one can foresee the end? I must prevent it. I must snatch my poor boy like a brand from the burning. I shall go to Edinburgh myself, to-morrow. I would start this very day, if I could leave my father.”

“You cannot possibly leave your father,” said the Earl, gently but decisively. “Sit down, Helen. You must keep quiet.”

For she was in a state of excitement, such as since her widowed days had never been betrayed by Helen Bruce.

“These debts must be paid, and immediately. The bare thought of them nearly drives me wild. But you shall not pay — do not think it,” she added, almost fiercely. “See what my son himself says — and thank God he had the grace to say it — that I am on no account to go to you, that he ‘will turn writer’s clerk, or tutor, or anything, rather than encroach further on Lord Cairnforth’s generosity.’”

“Poor boy! poor boy!”

“Then you don’t think him altogether a bad boy?” appealed Mrs. Bruce, piti-

fully. "You do not fear that I may live to weep over the day when my son was born?"

The Earl smiled, and that quiet, half-amused smile, coming upon her in her excited state, seemed to soothe the mother more than any reasoning could have done.

"No, Helen, I do not think any such thing. I think the lad has been very foolish, and we may have been the same. We kept him in leading-strings too long, and trusted him out of them too suddenly. But as to his being altogether bad — Helen Cardross's son, and the minister's grandson — Nonsense, my dear."

Mr. Cardross might have heard himself

named, for he stirred in his peaceful slumbers, and Helen hastily took her letter from Lord Cairnforth's hands.

"Not a word to him. He is too old. No trouble must ever come near him any more."

"No, Helen. But remember your promise to do nothing till you have talked with me? It is my right, you know. The boy is my boy too. When will you come up to the Castle? To-morrow? Nay, to-night, if you prefer it."


"I will come to-night."

So, at dusk, in the midst of a wild storm, such as in these regions sometimes, nay, almost always, succeeds very calm, mild autumn days, Helen appeared at

the Castle, and went at once into the library, where the Earl usually sat. Strange contrast it was, between the spacious apartment, with its lofty octagon walls laden with treasures of learning; book-shelves, tier upon tier, reaching to the very roof, which was painted in fresco; every ornamentation of the room being also made as perfect as its owner's fine taste and lavish means could accomplish — and this owner, this master of it all, — a diminutive figure, sitting all alone by the vacant fireside: before him a little table, a lamp, and a book. But he was not reading: he was sitting thinking, as he often did now: he said he had read so much in his time that he was rather weary of it, and pre-

ferred thinking. Of what? The life he had passed through — still, uneventful, and yet a full, and not empty, human life? Or it might be, oftener still, upon the life to come?

Lord Cairnforth refused to let his visitor say one word, or even sit down, till he had placed her in Mrs. Campbell's charge, to be dried and re-clothed, for she was dripping wet with rain — such rain as comes nowhere but at Loch Beg. By-and-bye she re-appeared in the library — moving through its heavy shadows, and looking herself again — the calm, dignified woman, “my cousin, Mrs. Bruce,” who sometimes appeared among Lord Cairnforth's guests, and whom, though she was



too retiring to attract much notice, everybody who did notice was sure to approve.

She took her accustomed place by the Earl's side, and plunged at once, in Helen's own out-spoken way, into the business which had brought her hither.

"I am not come to beg, or to borrow, do not think it: only to ask advice. Tell me, what am I to say to my boy?"

And again, the instant she mentioned her son's name, she gave way to tears. Yet all the while her friend saw that she was very hard, and bent upon being hard: that had Cardross appeared before her at that minute,

she would immediately have frozen up again into the stern mother, whose confidence had been betrayed, whose principles infringed ; and who, though loving her son with all the strength of her heart, could also punish him with all the power of her conscience, even though her heart was breaking with sorrow the while.

“ I will give you the best advice I can. But, first, let me have his letter again.”

Lord Cairnforth read it slowly over, Mrs. Bruce's eager eyes watching him, and then suffered her to take it from his helpless hands, and fold it up, tenderly, as mothers do.

“ What do you think of it ? ”

“ Exactly what I did this morning : that your boy has been very foolish, but not wicked. There is no attempt at deception or untruthfulness.”

“ No, thank God ! Whatever else he is, my son is not a liar. I have prevented, or conquered, that.”

“ Yes ; because you brought him up, as your father brought us up, to be afraid of nothing, to speak out our minds to him without fear of offending him, to stand in no dread of rousing his anger, but only of grieving his love. And so, you see, Helen, it is the same with your boy. He never attempts to deceive you. He tells out, point-blank, the most foolish things he has done — the most ridiculous expenses he has run

into. He may be extravagant, but he is not untruthful. I have no doubt, if I sent this list to his trades-people, they would verify every halfpenny, and that this really is the end of the list. Not such a long list neither, if you consider. Below that two hundred pounds, for which you were going to sell my ring."

"Were going! — I shall do it still."

"If you will: though it seems a pity to part with a gift of mine, when the sum is a mere nothing to me, with my large income; which, Helen, will one day be all yours."

Helen was silent: — a little sorry and ashamed. The Earl talked with her, till he had succeeded in calming her and

bringing her into her natural self again: able to see things in their right proportions, and take just views of all.

“Then you will trust me?” she said at last. “You think I may be depended upon to do nothing rashly when I go to Edinburgh to-morrow?”

“My dear, I have no intention of letting you go.”

“But some one must go. Something must be done; and I cannot trust Alick to do it — my brother does not understand my boy,” said she, returning to her restless, helpless manner. She, the helpful Helen — only weak in this one point — her only son.

“Something has been done. I have

already sent for Cardross. He will be at the Castle to-morrow."

Helen started.

"At the Castle, I said, not the Manse. No, Helen, you shall not be compromised: you may be as severe as you like with your son. But he is my son too"—and a faint shade of colour passed over the Earl's withered cheeks—"my adopted son; and it is time that he should know it."

"Do you mean to tell him?——"

"I mean to tell him all my intentions concerning him."

"What! now?"

"Yes, now. It is the safest and most direct course, both for him, for you, and for me. I have been thinking over the

matter all day, and can come to no other conclusion. Even for myself—if I may speak of myself—it is best. I do not wish to encroach upon his mother's rights—it is not likely I should," added the Earl, with a somewhat sad smile, "still it is hard that during the years, few or many, that I have to live, I, a childless man, should not enjoy a little of the comfort of a son."

Helen sat silent with averted face. It was all quite true, and yet——

"I will tell you, to make all clear, the position I wish Cardross to hold with regard to me—shall I?"

Mrs. Bruce assented.

"Into his mother's place he can never step; I do not desire it. You must



still be, as you have always been, and I shall now publicly give out the fact — my immediate successor; and, except for a stated allowance, to be doubled when he marries, which I hope he will, and early — Cardross must still be dependent upon his mother, during her lifetime. Afterwards, he inherits all. But there is one thing,” he continued, seeing that Helen did not speak, “I should like — it would make me happy — if on his coming of age he were to change his name, or add mine to it — be Alexander Cardross Bruce - Montgomerie — or simply Alexander Cardross Montgomerie. Which do you prefer?”

Helen meditated long. Many a change came and went over the widow's face

—widowed long enough for time to have softened down all things, and made her remember only the young days—the days of a girl's first love. It might have been so, for she said at last, almost with a gasp—

“I wish my son to be Bruce-Montgomerie.”

“Be it so.”

After that Lord Cairnforth was long silent.

Helen resumed the conversation by asking if he did not think it dangerous, almost wrong, to tell the boy of this brilliant future immediately after his errors?

“No; not after errors confessed and forsaken. Remember, it was over very

rags that the prodigal's father put upon him the purple robe. But our boy is not a prodigal, Helen. I know him well, and I have faith in him, and faith in human nature—especially Cardross nature.” And the Earl smiled. “Far deeper than any harshness will smite him the consciousness of being forgiven and trusted; of being expected to carry out in his future life all that was a-missing in two not particularly happy lives, his mother's—and mine.”

Helen Bruce resisted no more. She could not. She was a wise woman—a generous and loving-hearted woman; still in that self-contained, solitary existence, which had been spent close beside

her, yet into the mystery of which she had never penetrated, and never would penetrate, there was a nearness to heaven and heavenly things, and a clearness of vision about earthly things — which went far beyond her own. She could not quite comprehend it — she would never have thought of it herself — but she dimly felt that the Earl's judgment was correct, and that, strange as his conduct might appear, he was acting after that large sense of rightness which implies righteousness; a course of action which the world so often ridicules and misconstrues, because the point of view is taken from an altitude not of this world, and the objects regarded

therefrom are things not visible but invisible.

Cardross appeared next day — not at home, but at the Castle, and was closeted there for several hours with the Earl before he ever saw his mother. When he did,—and it was he who came to her, for she refused to take one step to go to him — he flung himself on his knees before her and sobbed in her lap — the great fellow of six feet high and twenty years old — sobbed and prayed for forgiveness with the humility of a child.

“ Oh, mother, mother — and *he* has forgiven me too! To think what he has done for me — what he is about to do — me, who have had no father,

or worse than none. Do you know, sometimes people in Edinburgh — the Menteiths, and so on — have taunted me cruelly about my father?"


"And what do you answer?" asked Helen in a slow, cold voice.

"That he was my father, and that he was dead; so I bade them speak no more about him."

"That was right, my son."

Then they were silent, till Cardross burst out again.

"It is wonderful — wonderful! I can hardly believe it yet. That we should never be poor any more — you, mother, who have gone through so much — and I, who thought I should have to work hard all my days for



both of us. And I will work ! ” cried the boy, as he tossed back his curls and lifted up to his mother a face that in brightness and energy was the very copy of her own, or what hers used to be. “ I ’ll show you, and the Earl too, how hard I can work ; as hard as if for daily bread. I ’ll do everything he wishes me — I ’ll be his ‘ right hand,’ as he says. I will make a name for myself and him too — mother, you know I am to bear his name ? ”

“ Yes, my boy.”

“ And I am glad to bear it. I told him so. He shall be proud of me yet, and you too. Oh, mother, mother, I will never vex you again.”

And once more his voice broke into sobs — and Helen's too, as she clasped him close, and felt that whatever God had taken away from her, He had given her as much — and more.

Mother and son — widowed mother and only son — there is something in the tie unlike all others in the world — not merely in its blessedness, but in its divine compensations.

Helen waited till her father had retired, which he often did quite early, for the days were growing too long for him, with whom every one of them was numbered ; and he listened to the wonderful news which his grandson told him with the even smile of old age, which nothing now either grieved or surprised.

“ You ’ll not be going to live at the Castle, though, not while I am alive, Helen ? ” was his first uneasy thought. But his daughter soon quieted it, and saw him to his bed, as she did every evening, bidding him good-night, and kissing his placid brow — placid as a child’s ; just as if he had been her child instead of her father. Then she took her son’s arm — such a stalwart arm now, and walked with him through the bright moonlight, clear as day, to Cairnforth Castle.

When they entered the library, they found the Earl sitting in his usual place, and engaged in his usual evening occupation, which he sometimes called “ the hard labour of doing


nothing." For though he was busy enough in the day-time, with a young man he had as secretary — his faithful old friend, Mr. Mearns, having lately died — still, he generally spent his evenings alone. Malcolm lurked within call, in case he wanted anything ; but he rarely did. Often he would pass hours at a time, sitting as now, with his feeble hands folded on his lap, his head bent, and his eyes closed ; or else open and looking out straight before him — calmly, but with an infinite yearning in them, that would have seemed painful to those who did not know how peaceful his inmost nature was.

But at the first sound of his

visitors' footsteps, he turned round — that is, he turned his little chair round — and welcomed them, heartily and brightly.

A little ordinary talk ensued ; in the which Cardross scarcely joined. The young man was not himself at all ; silent, abstracted ; and there was an expression in his face which almost frightened his mother — so solemn was it — yet withal so exceedingly sweet.

The Earl had been right in his conclusions ; he, with his keen insight into character, had judged Cardross better than the boy's own mother would have done. Those brilliant prospects, that total change in his expected future, which might have dazzled a




lower nature and sent it all astray, made this boy, — Helen's boy, with Helen's nature strong in him, only the more sensible of his deficiencies, as well as his responsibilities — humble, self-distrustful, and full of doubts and fears. Ten years seemed to have passed over his head since morning, changing him from a boy into a sedate, thoughtful man.

Lord Cairnforth noticed this, as he noticed everything; and at last, seeing the young heart was too full almost to bear much talking, he said kindly, —

“ Cardross, give your mother that arm-chair; she looks very wearied. And then, would you mind having a consultation with Malcolm about those

salmon - weirs at the head of Loch Mohr? I know he is longing to open his heart to you on the subject. Go, my boy, and don't hurry back. I want to have a good long talk with your mother."

Cardross obeyed. The two friends looked after him as he walked down the room — with his light, active step and graceful, gentlemanly figure — a youth who seemed born to be heir to all the splendours around him. Helen clasped her hands tightly together on her lap — and her lips moved. She did not speak, but the Earl almost seemed to hear the great outcry of the mother's heart going up to God — "Give anything Thou wilt to me, only give him all!"



Alas ! that such a cry should ever fall back to earth in the other pitiful moan — “ Would God that I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son — my son ! ”

But it was not to be so with Helen Bruce. Her son was no Absalom. Her days of sorrow were ended.

Lord Cairnforth saw how violently affected she was, and began to talk to her in a commonplace and practical manner about all that he and Cardross had been arranging that morning.

“ And I must say, that though he will never shine at College, and probably his grandfather would mourn over him as having no learning, there is



an amount of solid sense about the fellow with which I am quite delighted. He is companionable too — knows how to make use of his acquirements. Whatever light he possesses, he will never hide it under a bushel; which is perhaps the best qualification for the position that he will one day hold. I have no fear about Cardross. He will be an heir after my own heart: will accomplish all I wished — and possibly a little more.”

Mrs. Bruce answered only by tears.

“But there is one thing which he and I have settled between us, subject to your approval, of course. He must go back to College immediately.”

“To Edinburgh?”

“Do not look so alarmed, Helen. No — not to Edinburgh. It is best to break off all associations there — he wishes it himself. He would like to go to a new University — St. Andrews.”

“But he knows nobody there. He would be quite alone. For I cannot — do you not see I cannot? — leave my father. Oh, it is like being pulled in two,” cried Mrs. Bruce in great distress.

“Be patient, Helen, and hear. We have arranged it all — the boy and I. Next week we are both bound for St. Andrews.”


“You?”

“You think I shall be useless?—

that it is a man, and not such a creature as I, who ought to take charge of your boy?"

The Earl spoke with that deep bitterness which sometimes, though very, very rarely, he betrayed--till he saw what exceeding pain he had given.

"Forgive me, Helen; I know you did not mean that. But it was what I myself often thought, until this morning. Now I see that after all I—even I—may be the very best person to go with the boy, because while keeping a safe watch over him, and a cheerful house always open to him, I shall also give him somebody to take care of. I shall be as much charge to him almost as a woman—




and it will be good for him. Do you not perceive this?"

Helen did, clearly enough.

"Besides," continued the Earl, "I might, perhaps, like to see the world myself—just once again. At any rate I shall like to see it through this young man's eyes. He has not told you of our plan yet?"

"Not a word."

"That is well. I like to see he can keep faith. I made him promise not; because I wanted to tell you myself, Helen—I wanted to see how you would take the plan. Will you let us go? That is, the boy must go, and—you will do without me for a year?"



“A whole year! Cannot Cardross come home once—just once?”

“Yes, I will manage it so; he shall come, even if I cannot,” replied the Earl, and then was silent.

“And you,”—said Mrs. Bruce suddenly, after a long meditation upon her son and his future,—“you leave, for a year, your home, your pleasant life here; you change all your pursuits and plans, and give yourself no end of trouble, just to go and watch over my boy, and keep his mother’s heart from aching! How can I ever thank you—ever reward you?”

No, she never could.

“It is an ugly word ‘reward’—I don’t like it. And, Helen, I thought

thanks were long since set aside as unnecessary between you and me."

"And you will be absent a whole year?"

"Probably, or a little more; for the boy ought to keep two sessions at least. And locomotion is not so easy to me as it is to Cardross. Yes, my dear, you will have to part with me—I mean I shall have to part with you—for a year. It is a long time in our short lives. I would not do it—give myself the pain of doing it—for anything in this world—except to make Helen happy."

"Thank you; I know that."

But Helen, full of her son and his prospects—her youth renewed in

his youth, her life, absorbed in his, seeming to stretch out to a future where there was no ending—knew not half of what she thanked him for.

She yielded to all the Earl's plans; and after so many years of resistance, bowed her independent spirit to accept his bounty, with a humility of gratitude that was almost painful to both, until a few words of his led her to, and left her in the belief, that he was doing what was agreeable to himself—that he really did enjoy the idea of a long sojourn at St. Andrews. And, mother-like, when she was satisfied on this head, she began almost to envy him the blessing of her boy's constant society.


So she agreed to all his plans cheerfully, contentedly; as indeed she had good reason to be contented; thankfully accepted everything; and never for a moment suspected that she was accepting a sacrifice.



Chapter the Eighth.






URING a whole year the Earl of Cairnforth and Mr. Bruce-Montgomerie—for as soon as possible Cardross legally assumed the name—resided at that fairest of ancient cities, and pleasantest of Scotch Universities, St. Andrews.

A few of the older inhabitants may still remember the house the Earl occupied there, the society with which he filled it, and the general mode of life carried on by himself and his adopted son. Some may recall—for

indeed it was not easy to forget — the impression made in the good old town by the two new-comers, when they first appeared in the quiet streets, along the Links and on the West Sands — everywhere that the little carriage could be drawn. A strange contrast they were — the small figure in the pony-chair, and the tall young man walking beside it — in all the vigour, grace, and activity of his blooming youth. Two companions — pathetically unlike — and yet always seen together ; and evidently associating with one another from pure love.


They lived for some time in considerable seclusion, for the Earl's rank and wealth at first acted as a bar to much seeking of his acquaintance

among the proud and poor University professors, and old-fashioned inhabitants of the city. And Cardross, being the senior of most of the College lads, did not cultivate them much. By degrees, however, he became well known — not as a hard student — that was not his line — he never took any high College honours ; but he was the best golfer, the most dashing rider, the boldest swimmer ; — he saved more than one life on that dangerous shore ; and before the session was half over he was the most popular youth in the whole University. But he would leave everything, or give up everything — both his studies and his pleasures — to sit, patient as a girl, beside the



Earl's chair, or to follow it — often guiding it himself — up and down St. Andrews' streets ; never heeding who looked at him, or what comments were made — as they were sure to be made — upon him, until what was at first so strange and touching a sight, grew at last familiar to the whole town.

Of course, very soon all the circumstances of the case came out, probably with many imaginary additions, though the latter never reached the ears of the two concerned. Still, the tale was romantic and pathètic enough to make the Earl and his young heir objects of marked interest, and welcome guests in the friendly hospitalities of



the place. Which hospitalities were gladly requited, for Lord Cairnforth still keenly enjoyed society, and Cardross was at an age when all pleasure is attractive.


People said sometimes, What a lucky fellow was Mr. Bruce-Montgomerie! But they also said—as no one could help seeing and saying—that very few fathers were blessed with a son half so attentive and devoted as this young man was to the Earl of Cairnforth.

And meantime Helen Bruce lived quietly at the Manse, devoting herself to the care of her father, who still lingered on, feeble in body, though retaining most of his faculties—as though death were unwilling to end a life

which had so much of peace and enjoyment in it to the very last. When the session was over, Cardross went home to see his mother and grandfather, and on his return Lord Cairnforth listened eagerly to all the accounts of Cairnforth, and especially of all that Mrs. Bruce was doing there; she, as the person most closely acquainted with the Earl's affairs, having been constituted regent in his absence.

"She's a wonderful woman—my mother," said Cardross, with great admiration. "She has the sense of a man, and the tact of a woman. She is doing everything about the estate almost as cleverly as you would do it yourself."

"Is she? It is good practice for



her," said the Earl. "She will need it soon."

Cardross looked at him. He had never till then noticed, what other people began to notice, how exceedingly old the Earl now looked—his small, delicate features withering up almost like those of an elderly man, though he was not much past forty.

"You don't mean—oh, no, not that! You must not be thinking of that. My mother's rule at Cairnforth is a long way off yet." And—big fellow as he was—the lad's eyes filled with tears.

After that day, he refused all holiday excursions in which Lord Cairnforth could not accompany him. It was only by great persuasion that he agreed

to go for a week to Edinburgh, to
 revisit his old haunts there, to look
 at the new fields where he had sown
 his wild oats, and prove to even
 respectable and inquisitive Uncle Alick
 that there was no fear of their ever
 sprouting up again. And Lord Cairn-
 cross took the opportunity to intro-
 duce his cousin into his own set of
 Edinburgh friends—to familiarise the
 young man with the society in which
 he must shortly take his place—and
 to learn from them what he so
 warmly believed himself that Cardross
 was bound to be heir to any property
 of the Stewarts.


"What a pity," some added, "that
 he could not be heir to the Earldom

also!" "No," said others, — "better that 'the wee Earl' (as old-fashioned folk still sometimes called him) should be the last Earl of Cairnforth."

With the exception of those two visits, during a whole twelvemonth the Earl and his adopted son were scarcely parted for a single day. Years afterwards, Cardross loved to relate, first to his mother, and then to his children, sometimes with laughter, and again with scarcely repressed tears, many an anecdote of the life they two led together at St. Andrews—a real student life, yet filled at times with the gayest amusements. For the Earl loved gaiety—actual mirth; sometimes he and Cardross were as full of

jokes and pranks as two children, and at other times they held long conversations, upon all manner of grave and earnest topics—like equal friends. It was the sort of companionship, free and tender, cheerful and bright, yet with all the influence of the elder over the younger—which, occurring to a young man of Cardross's age and temperament, usually determines his character for life.

Thus, day by day, Helen's son developed and matured; becoming more and more a thorough Cardross, sound to the core, and yet polished outside, in a manner which had not been the lot of any of the earlier generation—save the minister. Also, he had a certain winning



way with him—a power of suiting himself to everybody, and pleasing everybody—which even his mother, who only pleased those she loved, or those that loved her, had never possessed.

“It’s his father’s way he has, ye ken,” Malcolm would say—Malcolm, who, after a season of passing jealousy, had for years succumbed wholly to his admiration of “Miss Helen’s bairn.” “But it’s the only bit o’ the Bruces that the lad’s gotten in him—thank the Lord!”

Though the Earl did not say openly “thank the Lord,” still he, too, recognised with a solemn joy, that the qualities he and Helen dreaded had either not been inherited by

Captain Bruce's son, or else timely care had rooted them out. And as he gradually relaxed his watch over the young man, and left him more and more to his own guidance, Lord Cairnforth, sitting alone in his house at St. Andrews—almost as much alone as he used to sit in the Castle library—would think, with a strange consolation, that this year's heavy sacrifice had not been in vain.

Once Cardross, coming in from a long golfing match, broke upon one of these meditative fits, and was a little surprised to find that the Earl did not rouse himself out of it quite so readily as was his wont; also that the endless College stories, which he

always liked so much to listen to, fell rather blank, and did not meet Lord Cairnforth's hearty laugh, as gay as that of a young fellow who could share and sympathise in them all.

"You are not well to-day," suddenly said the lad. "What have you been doing?"

"My usual work -- nothing."

"But you have been thinking. What about?" — cried Cardross, with the affectionate persistency of one who knew himself a favourite; and looking up in the Earl's face with his bright, fond eyes — Helen's very eyes.

"I was thinking of your mother, my boy. You know it is a whole year since I have seen your mother."

"So she said in her last letter, and wondered when you intended coming home, because she misses you more and more every day."

"You, she means, Carr."

"No, yourself. I know my mother wishes you would come home."

"Does she? And so do I. But I should have to leave you alone, my boy. For if once I make the effort, and return to Cairn-forth, I know I shall never quit it more."

He spoke earnestly — more so than the occasion seemed to need, and there was a weary look in his eyes which struck his companion.

"Are you afraid to leave me

alone, Lord Cairnforth?" asked Cardross, sadly.

"No." And again — as if he had not answered strongly enough—he repeated, "My dear boy, no!"

"Thank you. You never said it — but I knew. You came here for my sake, to take charge of me. You made me happy — you never blamed me — you neither watched me nor domineered over me — still, I knew. Oh, how good you have been!"

Lord Cairnforth did not speak for some time, and then he said, gravely, —

"However things were at first, you must feel, my boy, that I trust you now entirely, and that you and I are thorough friends — equal friends."

"Not equal. Oh, never in my whole life shall I be half as good as you! But I'll try hard to be as good as I can. And I shall be always beside you. Remember your promise."

This was, that after he came of age, and ended his University career, instead of taking "the grand tour," like most young heirs of the period, Cardross should settle down at home, in the character of Lord Cairnforth's private secretary—always at hand, and ready in every possible way to lighten the burthen of business which, even as a young man, the Earl had found heavy enough, and as an old man he would be unable to bear.

"I shall never be clever, I know that," pleaded the lad, who was learning a touching humility. "But I may be useful; and oh, if you will but use me—in anything or everything!—I'd work day and night for you—I would indeed!"

"I know you would, my son." (The Earl sometimes called him "my son," when they were by themselves.) "And so you shall."

That evening Lord Cairnforth dictated to Helen — by her boy's hand — one of his rare letters; telling her that he and Cardross would return home, in time for the latter's birthday, which would be in a month from now, and which he wished kept

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This was, that after he came of age, and ended his University career, instead of taking "the grand tour," like most young heirs of the period, Cardross should settle down at home, in the character of Lord Cairnforth's private secretary — "I can now wholly trust you to be — the future master of Cairnforth."

And so, as soon as the Earl's letter reached the peninsula, the rejoicings began. The tenantry knew well enough who the

"I shall never be clever, I know that," pleaded the lad, who was learning a touching humility. "But I may be useful; and oh, if you will but use me—in anything or everything!—I'd work day and night for you—I would indeed!"

"I know you would, my son." (The Earl sometimes called him "my son," when they were by themselves.) "And so you shall."

That evening Lord Cairnforth dictated certain narrow-necked boy's hand — one probably, nay certainly, in its pride would have shut itself up against a stranger, or an inferior, — opened freely to "Miss Helen's" son and the minister's grandson, a young

man known to all and approved by all.

So the festivity was planned to be just the Earl's coming of age over again, with the difference between June and December, which removed the feasting-place from the lawn to the great kitchen of the Castle ; and caused bonfires on the hill-tops to be a very doubtful mode of jubilation. The old folk — young then — who remembered the bright summer festival of twenty - four years ago, told many a tale of that day, and how the "puir wee Earl" came forward in his little chair and made his brief speech — every word and every promise


of which his after-life had so faithfully fulfilled.

“The heir’s a wise-like lad, and a braw lad,” said the old folks of the clachan, patronisingly. “He’s no that ill the noo, and he’ll aiblins grow better, ye ken ; but naebody that comes after will be like *him*. We’ll ne’er see anither Earl o’ Cairnforth.”

— The same words which Mr. Men-teith and the rest had said when the Earl was born ; but with what a different meaning !

Lord Cairnforth came back among his own people amidst a transport of welcome. Though he had been long away, Mrs. Bruce, and other

assistants, had carried out his plans and orders so successfully, that the estate had not suffered for his absence. In the whole extent of it was now little or no poverty ; none like that which, in his youth, had startled Lord Cairnforth into activity, upon hearing the story of the old shepherd of Loch Mohr. There was plenty of work, and hands to do it, along the shores of both lochs ; new farms had sprung up, and new roads been made ; churches and schools were built as occasion required. And though the sheep had been driven a little higher up the mountains, and the deer and grouse fled farther back into the inland moors, still Cairnforth village was a lovely spot,




inhabited by a contented community. Civilization could bring to it no evils that were not counteracted by two strong influences — (stronger than anyone can conceive who does not understand the peculiarities, almost feudal in their simplicity, of country parish life in Scotland) — a minister like Mr. Cardross, and a resident proprietor like the Earl of Cairnforth.

The Earl arrived a few days before the festival day, and spent the time in going over his whole property from one end to the other. He took Mrs. Bruce with him. "I can't want you for a day now, Helen," said he, and made her sit beside him in his car-

riage, which, by dint of various modern appliances, he could now travel in far easier than he used to do; or else asked her to drive him in the old familiar pony - chaise, along the old familiar hill - side roads; whence you look down on either loch — sometimes on both — lying like a sheet of silver below.

Many a drive they took, every day; the weather being still and calm, as it often is at Cairnforth, by fits and snatches — all winter through.

“I think there never was such a place as this place,” the Earl would often say, when he stopped at particular points of view, and gazed




his fill on every well-known outline of the hills, and curve of the lochs; generally ending with a smiling look on the face beside him, equally familiar, which had watched all these things with him for more than thirty years. "Helen, I have had a happy life, or it seems so, looking back upon it. Remember, I said this; and let no one ever say the contrary."

And in all the houses they visited — farm, cottage, or bothie — everybody noticed how exceedingly happy the Earl looked; how cheerfully he spoke, and how full of interest he was in everything around him.

"His lordship may live to be an auld man yet," said some

one to Malcolm ; and Malcolm indignantly repudiated the possibility of anything else.

The minister was left a little lonely during this week of Lord Cairnforth's coming home ; but he did not seem to feel it. He felt nothing very much now — except pleasure in the sunshine and the fire — in looking at the outside of his books, now rarely opened, and in watching the bright faces around him. He was made to understand what a grand festival was to be held at Cairnforth, and the Earl took especial pains to arrange that the feeble octogenarian should be brought to the Castle without fatigue, and enabled to appear both at the tenants' feast



in the kitchen, and the more formal banquet of friends and neighbours in the hall — the grand old dining-room — which was arranged exactly as it had been on the Earl's coming of age.

However, there was a difference. Then the board was almost empty, now it was quite full. With a carefulness that at the time Helen almost wondered at, the Earl collected about him that day the most brilliant gathering he could invite from all the country round ; people of family, rank, and wealth — above all, people of worth ; who, either by inherited position, or that high character which is the best possession of all, could confer honour by

their presence — and who, since “a man is known by his friends,” would be suitable and creditable friends to a young man just entering the world.

And before all these — with Helen sitting as mistress at the foot of the table, and Helen’s father at his right hand — the Earl of Cairnforth introduced, in a few simple words, his chosen heir.

“Deliberately chosen,” he added, “not merely as being my cousin and my nearest of kin, but because he is his mother’s son, and Mr. Cardross’s grandson, and worthy of them both — also, because, for his own sake, I respect him, and I love him. I give you the health of Alexander Cardross Bruce-Montgomerie.”

And then they all wished the young man joy, and the dining-hall of Cairnforth Castle rang with hearty cheers for Mr. Bruce-Montgomerie.

No more speeches were made, for it was noticed that Lord Cairnforth looked excessively wearied; but he kept his place to the last. Of the many brilliant circles that he had entertained at his hospitable board, none were ever more brilliant than this; none gayer, with the genial, wholesome gaiety which the Earl, of whom it might truly be said,—

“A merrier man


I never spent an hour’s talk withal,”

knew so well how to scatter around

him. By what magic he did this, no one ever quite found out; but it was done, and especially so on this night of all nights, when, after his long absence, he came back to his own ancestral home, and appeared again among his own neighbours and friends. They long remembered it—and him.

At length the last carriage rolled away, and shortly afterwards the wind began suddenly to rise and howl wildly round the Castle. There came on one of those wild winter-storms, common enough in these regions—brief, but fierce while they last.

“You cannot go home,” said the Earl to Mrs. Bruce, who remained with him;—the minister having



departed with his son Duncan early in the evening. "Stay here till to-morrow. Cardross, persuade your mother. You never yet spent a night under my roof. Helen, will you do it this once? I shall never ask you again."

There was an earnest entreaty in his manner which Helen could not resist; and, hardly knowing why she did it, she consented. Her son went off to his bed, fairly worn out with pleasurable excitement; and she stayed with Lord Cairnforth—as he seemed to wish—for another half-hour. They sat by the library fire, listening to the rain beating and the wind howling—not continuously, but coming and going in frantic blasts, which seemed like the voices

• of living creatures borne on its wings.

“Do you mind, Helen, it was just such a night as this when Mr. Men-teith died, before I went to Edinburgh? The sort of wind that, they say, is always sent to call away souls. I know not why it is, or why there should be any connexion between things material and immaterial, comprehensible and wholly incomprehensible, but I often sit here and fancy I should like my soul to be called away in just such a tempest as this,—to be set free,

‘And on the wings of mighty winds
Go flying all abroad,’—

as the psalm has it. It would be glorious—glorious! suddenly to find one’s

self strong, active,—cumbered with no burthen of a body—to be all spirit, and spirit only.”

As the Earl spoke, his whole face, withered and worn as it was, lighted up and glowed—till it became, Helen thought, almost like what one could imagine a disembodied soul.

She answered nothing, for she could find nothing to say. Her quiet, simple faith was almost frightened at the passionate intensity of his, and the nearness with which he seemed to realize the unseen world.

“I wonder,” he said again,—“I sometimes sit for hours wondering—what the other life is like: the life of which we know nothing, yet which may be

so near to us all. I often find myself planning about it in a wild, vague way; what I am to do in it—what God will permit me to do—and to be. Surely, something more than He ever permitted here.”

“I believe that,” said Helen. And after her habit of bringing all things to the one test and the one teaching, she reminded him of the parable of the talents, “I think,” she added, “that you will be one of those whom, in requital for having made the most of all His gifts here, He will make ‘ruler over ten cities’—at least, if He is a just God.”

“He is a just God. In my worst trials I have never doubted that,” re-

plied Lord Cairnforth, solemnly. And then he repeated those words of Saint Paul to which many an agonized doubter has clung, as being the last refuge of sorrow—the only key to mysteries which sometimes shake the firmest faith—"For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known."

When Helen rose to retire, which was not till midnight—for the Earl seemed unwilling to let her go, saying it was so long since they had had a quiet talk together—he asked her earnestly if she was content about her son?

"Perfectly content. Not merely content, but happy: happier than I once thought it possible to be in this world. And it is you who have done it all—you who have made my boy what he is. But he will reward you—I know he will. Henceforward he will be as much your son as mine."

"I hope so. And now good night, my dear."

"Good night—God bless you!"

Mrs. Bruce knelt down beside the chair, and touched with her lips the poor, useless hands.

"Helen," said the Earl as she rose, "kiss me—just once—as I remember your doing when I was a boy—a poor, lonely, miserable boy."

She kissed him — very tenderly ; then went away and left him sitting there, in his little chair opposite the fire, alone in the large, splendid, empty room.

* * * * *

Helen Bruce could not sleep that night. Either the day's excitement had been too much for her, or she was disturbed by the wild winds that went shrieking round the Castle, reminding her over and over again of what the Earl had just said concerning them. There came into her mind an uneasy feeling about her father, whom for so many years she had never left a night alone ; but it was useless re-

greeting this now. At last, towards morning, the storm gradually lulled. She rose, and looked out of her window on the loch, which glittered in the moonlight like a sea of glass. It reminded her, with an involuntary fancy, of the sea "clear as glass, like unto crystal," spoken of in the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse as being "before the Throne." She stood looking at it for a minute or so — then went back to her bed and slept peacefully till day-light.

She was dressing herself — full of quiet and happy thoughts, admiring the rosy winter sunrise, and planning all she meant to do that day, — when she was startled by Mrs. Campbell,

who came suddenly into the room, with a face as white and rigid as marble.

“He’s awa,” she said, or rather whispered.

“Who is away?” shrieked Helen, thinking at once of her father.

“Whisht!” said the old nurse, catching hold of Mrs. Bruce as she was rushing from the room, and speaking beneath her breath—“whisht!—My lord’s deid; but we’ll no greet; I canna greet. He’s gane awa hame.”

No, it was not the old man who was called—Mr. Cardross lived several years after then—lived to be nearly ninety. It was the far younger life—

young, and yet how old in suffering! — which had thus suddenly and unexpectedly come to an end.

The Earl was found dead in his bed, in his customary attitude of repose — just as Malcolm always placed him, and left him till the morning. His eyes were wide open, so that he could not have died in his sleep. But how, at what hour, or in what manner he had died — whether the summons had been slow or sudden, whether he had tried to call assistance and failed, or whether, calling no one, and troubling no one, his fearless soul had passed, and chosen to pass, thus solitary unto its God — none ever knew, or ever could

know; and it was all the same now.

He died as he had lived, quite alone. But it did not seem to have been a painful death, for the expression of his features was perfectly peaceful; and they had already settled down into that mysteriously beautiful death-smile which is never seen on any human face but once.

Helen stood and looked down upon it—the dear familiar face; now, in the grandeur of death, suddenly grown strange. She thought of what they had been talking about last night concerning the world to come. Now, he knew all. She did not “greet;” she could not. In spite of its outward incompleteness,

it had been a noble life—an almost perfect life ; and now it was ended. He had had his desire ; his poor, helpless body cumbered him no more ;—he was “away.”

* * * * *

It was a bright winter morning the day the Earl of Cairnforth was buried,—clear hard frost, and a little snow, not much—snow never lies long on the shores of Loch Beg. There was no stately funeral, for it was found that he had left express orders to the contrary ; but four of his own people, Malcolm Campbell and three more, took on their shoulders the small coffin, scarcely heavier than a child's, and bore it tenderly from Cairnforth Castle to

Cairnforth kirkyard. After it came a long, long train of silent mourners, as is customary in Scotch funerals — such a procession as had not been witnessed for centuries in all this country-side. Ere they left the Castle, the funeral prayer was offered up by Mr. Cardross — the last time the good old minister's voice was ever heard publicly in his own parish, — and at the head of the coffin walked, as chief mourner, Cardross Bruce - Montgomerie, the Earl's adopted son.

And so, laid beside his father and mother, they left him to his rest.

According to his own wish, his grave bears this inscription, carved upon a plain upright stone, which — also by

his particular request — stands with its
face towards the Manse-windows :—

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